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HARD POWER AND SOFT POWER;
A YOUNG COMPANY COMMANDER'S DILEMMA

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"Win the people, win the peace"

PIED PIPER
SOFT POWER
- Build Trust
- Win Hearts and Minds
- Respect and Dignity
- Enable Intelligence
- Isolate the Enemy
- Create Opportunities

SWITCH AS SITUATION DEMANDS
COMPLEMENTARY NOT CONTRADICTORY

GABBAR SINGH
HARD POWER
- Decisive Force
- Neutralise Terrorists
- Create Deterrence
- Restore Security
- Protect Civilians
- Follow up with Soft Power

Awaam Our Strength

TERROR WILL NOT WIN

KEY LESSONS FOR COUNTER TERRORISM OPERATORS
1. Understand the People
2. Balance Hard and Soft Power
3. Minimise Collateral Damage
4. Be Flexible – Switch Roles
5. Lasting Peace is the Aim

SECURE KASHMIR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

HARD POWER AND SOFT POWER; A YOUNG COMPANY COMMANDER'S DILEMMA

By
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The Young Company Commander's Dilemma

Do These and Much More. Do address people with *Jeenab* and *Mohtarma / Didi*, do interact with *maulvis*, do seek blessings of *Hajies* and conduct *Iftaars*, do organise celebrations of Independence and Republic Days in schools, do attend to festivities at *Awaams'* homes, do empower the youth for jobs, do keep youth engaged in cricket, do ensure quality education and culture in your Army Goodwill School; the list of do's goes on and, on and, on.

Don't Do This and That. Don't wave *dandas* at the *Awaam,* don't ask *Awaam* to raise *phirens*, don't disrespect the *Awaam*, don't misbehave with women and elders, don't search houses without Policemen and, don't fire without seeing a weapon; an endless list of many more don'ts.

But, Don't Forget .... And above all, don't forget that neutralising terrorists is a key Mission Essential Task. A young company commander retorts, ***"What the heck?*** *I am thoroughly confused. I can either do the hard power stuff or the soft power stuff, not both".*

Unravelling the Knots, Twists and Curls

The Parliament enacted the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990 (AF(Jammu and Kashmir) SPA, 90, *hereafter just the Act*) after great deliberations. A cursory comparison between the 1958 (Assam) and 1990 (Jammu and Kashmir) versions of the Act, throws light on the Parliament's appreciation of the strategic relevance of Jammu and Kashmir to national security. The primary aim of the Act is to empower the Government of India or any of the States, to employ the Armed Forces of the Nation to bring peace to a disturbed part(s) of the Nation *(restore adverse 'public order' situation to normal 'law and order' situation)*. The Parliament in 1990 defined **'DISTURBED'** in Section 3 of the Act, for making this Act applicable to a part(s) of the Nation as under *(no such word or definition in the 1958 version)*:-

- Government and people overawed by terrorists.
- **Communal hatred** leading to discomfort of a community.
- Plans/acts of **secession** from the Indian Union.
- Attempts to insult Indian National symbols (Tricolour, Anthem and Constitution).

An analysis of definition of **'DISTURBED'** in Section 3 of the Act leads us to **our mission** in a 'disturbed area'. I could phrase it as, **"Defeating terrorism, imbibing secularism and achieving national integration"**. These three essential tasks of our mission are not sequential i.e. first make the people feel safe, then imbibe secular values and

finally, achieve integration with the Nation. They are to be carried out simultaneously as they are inter-linked, albeit the quantity of effort on each will vary with time, situation, and environment. In my opinion, neutralising terrorism is a key task, as unless the mind is without fear, secularism, integration and peace cannot flow. So simple and so agreeable! But, neutralising terrorists alone, without imbibing secularism and Indian-ness will never lead to winning peace.

As instructors in Commando and Young Officers' Wings, we learnt that our young officers are capable of smart multi tasking. Syllabi, fault-findings, firing, directing staffs' instructions, sports, socialising, orders from commanding officer and seconds-in-command from the units, demanding parents from home, lonely girlfriends from previous stations, swanky motorbikes, 2G cellular phones and e-mails; they juggled it all *soooo* very well. So then, why do they freeze when told to balance between hard and soft powers as per the prevalent operating environment? I fail to understand this freezing of the gifted minds and bodies of our young company commanders. The Parliament multi tasked us when it enacted the Act in 1990. Nothing new here. The only 'new' is the slight tilting of the balance towards soft power. This tilting is a result of the efforts of our predecessors. Their use of hard power (bullets, sweat and blood) over the last 23 years has made the peoples' minds free from fear and malleable (not totally) to accept a Tricoloured narrative.

We've all read of the Colour / Arab Spring or Revolutions. The new paradigm of people's power introduced by Pakistan into its proxy 4GW in 2008 requires that, the security forces develop new strategies and tactics. Our experience with young officers has taught us that, outsmarting the enemy (second-in-command, directing staff, parents, suspicious girlfriend{s}) comes easy to young minds and bodies. Directing Staff of Young Officers' Wing always had to make huge investments of time and effort in not being outsmarted by the young officers. We succeeded only on rare occasions and, these were restricted to the syndicate rooms only. So when the Separatists changed their strategy in 2008, from that of 'terrorism' to 'non-violent political defiance', why have our young smart company commanders frozen in their feet and between their ears? Non-violent political defiance is the original strategy of the Mahatma, later adopted by Martin Luther King Jr and Nelson Mandela, and now developed into *'From Dictatorship to Democracy'* by Gene Sharp. We will all agree to the proposition that, 'ideas can be defeated by ideas alone, not by rifles. No scope for disagreement! So tell me young minds, how can we defeat religious radicalism and secessionism? By counter ideas of secularism and National integration. *Simple*. Our rifles and bullets are just to make the Awaams' minds receptive to our counter ideas. *Can't be put across more simply dimply, dummies.*

Gabbar Singh and Pied Piper. It's time to limber up and hit the village/ road/ jungle with a well balanced mix of hearts and minds, gestures and words, greeting cards and chocolates, SMSs and e-mails and, controlled rifles and accurate bullets. In a proxy 4GW of ideas, victory will grace the chest of those young company commanders whose armoury contains kind gestures, sweet words, chocolates, controlled rifles and accurate bullets. We must keep switching between being 'Gabbar Singh' and 'Pied Piper'; Gabbar Singh for the terrorists and Pied Piper for the Separatists and our *Awaam*. Imagine a day in the future when, after Gabbar Singh has neutralised most (not all) terrorists, Pied Piper leads the Kashmiri *Awaam* through the new Banihal road and rail tunnels and, by the 22 daily civil flights landing at Srinagar to a permanent integration with India. In young officer language, **'The Axe Effect'**. If young

military blood can make girls flock to the VI[th] Term Ball at the **National Defence Academy** and to the **Defence Services Officers Institute, Mhow** (and many other discrete unmentionable places), South under/ over the Banihal Pass should be a cake walk. Or have we overestimated our young officers? Come on guys; prove that you can do it. ***Dil mange more. Desh mange more.***

Our Trumpet Call

The trumpet call is clear. Let's do it for our Nation, for the people of our area of responsibility, for the troops we lead, for the safety of our families, and for our own self respect. Let's smarten up to the occasion and work out and work within the fine balance of hard and soft powers so that, we deliver on the three essential tasks of our mission laid out by the Parliament through the AF (Jammu and Kashmir) SPA, 1990.



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Concluding Remarks — Relevance as of 2026

Reading a 2013 Company Commander's Dilemma as a Framework for Marketing, Sales, HR and Public-Policy Strategy Today

Added in 2026 by the author, Sanjay P Vishwasrao, Major General, Retired, to the original 2013 article published in The Infantry Journal (India).

This article was written in 2013 to resolve what looked, to a young company commander, like an impossible contradiction: be Gabbar Singh and be the Pied Piper, in the same village, sometimes on the same day. The resolution — that hard power and soft power are not rival choices but a single dial to be moved dynamically, as the situation demands — is a leadership skill every serious organisation eventually needs, well beyond a counter-terrorism theatre.

Relevance for Corporate Marketing

A brand needs its own version of both postures: a hard-power register for defending market share, responding to a competitor's attack, or enforcing intellectual property — and a soft-power register for storytelling, community goodwill and customer trust. Marketing teams built around only one register tend to fail in the same way this article warns against: all Gabbar Singh reads as aggressive and burns trust; all Pied Piper reads as toothless the moment a real competitive threat appears. The skill this article actually teaches is not which posture is correct, but how fast a team can read the situation and switch.

Corporate Parallel — A Brand Needs Both Registers, on a Dynamic Switch

The most resilient brands are neither purely combative nor purely gentle — they read the situation and move deliberately between assertive competitive defence and warm customer engagement, the same 'dynamic switch' this article asks of a company commander. A marketing function with only one setting is predictable, and a predictable competitor is an easy one.

Relevance for a Product Sales Force and Human Resource Management

The 'young company commander's dilemma' — told to do an endless list of gentle, relationship-building do's, then handed an equally long list of firm don'ts, then reminded that the mission still has to be closed — is precisely the dilemma handed to any sales manager or first-time people manager: build the relationship, but also hit the number; support your team, but also hold the difficult line when performance slips. HR and leadership-development functions already have a name for this skill under a different label — situational leadership, adjusting one's directive or supportive style to the person and the moment — and this article's own resolution is the same one: not a contradiction to be paralysed by, but a single skill to be trained, drilled, and exercised in real time.

Corporate Parallel — Situational Leadership, Not a Fixed Management Style

A sales lead or a first-line manager who can only push, or only nurture, will eventually lose either the numbers or the team. Training people explicitly to diagnose the situation first, and then choose the firm or the supportive response deliberately, is what separates a manager who freezes at the first real contradiction from one who resolves it in seconds.

Relevance for Government Policy Institutions and Think Tanks

This same dial — hard power and soft power, deployed dynamically rather than chosen once and fixed — is the working definition of what international-relations scholars call 'smart power.' The article's own case, a security force having to enforce the law, neutralise a genuine threat, and simultaneously win the trust of the very population it operates among, is a compact model for any public institution balancing enforcement with legitimacy: a regulator, a police force, or a government department managing a wary public. The lesson holds: neither register alone delivers lasting peace or lasting compliance — only a well-drilled ability to move between them as the situation genuinely requires.

Relevance for Policy Design — Smart Power as the Working Standard

A policy or enforcement regime built only on hard power invites resentment it can never fully police; one built only on soft power invites exploitation by those with no intention of reciprocating good faith. The institutions that hold legitimacy longest are the ones that have trained their people, like this article's young company commander, to read the room and switch registers without hesitation.

I remain available to advise on, and speak to, this same discipline — building the judgement to switch deliberately between firmness and empathy — applied to brand strategy, sales and people leadership, and public-institution design.