



Defence Reforms and National Security Managing Threats and Challenges to India

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South Asia is the second most unstable region in the world and is closely following West Asia in the race to reach the number one spot. Among the world's major democracies India faces the most complex threats and challenges spanning the full spectrum of conflict from nuclear to sub-conventional. Unresolved territorial disputes with China and Pakistan, insurgencies in Jammu and Kashmir and the north-eastern states, the rising tide of left wing extremism (LWE) and the growing spectre of urban terrorism have vitiated India's security environment.

I SEARCH FOR A STRATEGIC DEFENCE REVIEW

Despite the prolonged exposure that the security establishment has had in dealing with multifarious challenges, India's national security continues to be poorly managed. In fact, no Indian government till today has undertaken a strategic defence review.

The only time a review was undertaken in the recent past was after the Kargil conflict of 1999 when the Kargil Review Committee headed by the doyenne of Indian strategic thinkers, the late Mr. K Subrahmanyam, was appointed. The committee was asked to "...review the events leading up to the Pakistani aggression in the Kargil District of Ladakh in Jammu & Kashmir; and, to recommend such measures as are considered necessary to safeguard national security against such armed intrusions."

Besides Mr. Subrahmanyam, who was appointed chairman, the Committee comprised three members: Lieutenant General (Retd.) K. K. Hazari,

B. G. Verghese and Satish Chandra, Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) who was also designated as Member-Secretary. Though it had been given a very narrow and limited charter, the committee looked holistically at the threats and challenges and examined the loopholes in the management of national security.

The committee was of the view that, "the political, bureaucratic, military and intelligence establishments appear to have developed a vested interest in the status quo." Consequently, it made far reaching recommendations on the development of India's nuclear deterrence, the management of national security, intelligence reforms, border management, the defence budget, the use of air power, counter-insurgency operations, integrated manpower policy, defence research and development, and media relations. The committee's report was tabled in Parliament on February 23, 2000.

The Cabinet Committee on Security then appointed a Group of Ministers (GoM) to study the Kargil Review Committee report and recommend measures for implementation. The GoM was headed by Home Minister L K Advani and comprised Defence Minister George Fernandes, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha and National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra. In turn, the GoM set up four task forces on intelligence reforms, internal security, border management and defence management to undertake in-depth analysis of various facets of national security management. These were headed, respectively, by Jammu and Kashmir Governor Mr. G. C. Saxena, former defence and home secretary and principal secretary to the Prime Minister Mr. N. N. Vohra, former home secretary Mr. Madhav Godbole and

Mr. Arun Singh, former Union minister who was then an advisor to the Ministry of External Affairs on security matters and who had himself headed the Committee on Defence Expenditure in the early 1990s.

The GoM recommended sweeping reforms to the existing national security management system and the CCS accepted all its recommendations, including one for the establishment of the post of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) – which still has not happened. As approved by the CDS, a tri-Service Andaman and Nicobar Command and a Strategic Forces Command were established. Other salient measures included the establishment of HQ Integrated Defence Staff (IDS); the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA); the establishment of a Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) headed by the defence Minister with two wings: the Defence Procurement Board and the Defence technology Board; management of borders with different countries by a single border management agency (e.g. the western border with Pakistan is managed by the BSF); and, the nomination of the CRPF as India's primary counter-insurgency operations force.

Despite the new measures approved for implementation by the CCS on May 11, 2001, many lacunae still remain in the management of national security. In order to review the progress of implementation of the proposals approved by the CCS in 2001 and to take stock of the new developments over the last 10 years, such as the threats emanating from the sea a la the Mumbai terror strikes and the rapid deterioration of the regional security environment due to the growing spread of radical extremism and creeping Talibanisation, the government appointed a Task Force on National Security in mid-June 2011.

The task force is led by Mr. Naresh Chandra, former Cabinet Secretary and ambassador to the

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US and comprises 13 other members. The members include Mr. G Parthasarathy, former High Commissioner to Pakistan, Air Chief Marshal S. Krishnaswamy (Retd), Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd), Lt Gen V. R. Raghavan (Retd), Dr. Anil Kakodkar, former chief of the Department of Atomic Energy, Mr. K. C. Verma, former Secretary R&AW and Mr. V. K. Duggal, former Union Home Secretary, among others. The task force has been given six months to submit its report.

II MANAGING NATIONAL SECURITY

There is much needs to be done to improve the management of national security in India. The first and foremost requirement is for the government to formulate a comprehensive National Security Strategy (NSS), including internal security, so that all the stakeholders are aware of what is expected of them.

The NSS should be formulated after carrying out an inter-departmental, inter-agency, multi-disciplinary strategic defence review. Such a review must take the public into confidence and not be conducted behind closed doors. Like in most other democracies, the NSS should be signed by Prime Minister, who is the head of government, and must be placed on the table of Parliament and released as a public document. Only then will various stakeholders be compelled to take ownership of the strategy and work unitedly to achieve its aims and objectives.

It has clearly emerged that China poses the most potent military threat to India and, given the nuclear, missile and military hardware nexus between China and Pakistan, future conventional conflict in Southern Asia will be a two-front war. Therefore, India's military strategy of dissuasion against China must be gradually upgraded to deterrence. Genuine deterrence comes only from the capability to launch and sustain major offensive operations into the adversary's territory. India needs to raise new divisions to carry the next war deep into Tibet. Since manoeuvre is not possible due to the restrictions imposed by the difficult mountainous terrain, firepower capabilities need to be enhanced by an order of magnitude, especially in terms of precision-guided munitions. This will involve substantial upgradation of ground-based (artillery guns, rockets and missiles) and aerially-delivered (fighter-bomber aircraft and attack helicopter) firepower. Only then will it be possible to achieve future military objectives.

The armed forces are now in the fifth and final

year of the 11th Defence Plan (2007-12) and it has not yet been formally approved by the government. The government has also not approved the long-term integrated perspective plan (LTIPP 2007-22) formulated by HQ Integrated Defence Staff. Without these essential approvals, defence procurement is being undertaken through ad hoc annual procurement plans, rather than being based on carefully prioritised long-term plans that are designed to systematically enhance India's combat potential. These are serious lacunae as effective defence planning cannot be undertaken in a policy void.

The government must commit itself to supporting long-term defence plans or else defence modernisation will continue to lag and the present quantitative military gap with China's People's Liberation Army will become a qualitative gap as well in 10 to 15 years. This can be done only by making the dormant National Security Council a pro-active policy formulation body for long term national security planning. (The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) deals with current and near term threats and challenges and reacts to emergent situations.)

The defence procurement decision making process must be speeded up. The army is still without towed and self-propelled 155mm howitzers for the plains and the mountains and urgently needs to acquire weapons and equipment for counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations. The navy has been waiting for long for the INS Vikramaditya (Admiral Gorshkov) aircraft carrier, which is being refurbished in a Russian shipyard at exorbitant cost. Construction of the indigenous air defence ship is lagging behind schedule.

The plans of the air force to acquire 126 multi-mission, medium-range combat aircraft in order to maintain its edge over the regional air forces are also stuck in the procurement quagmire. All three Services need a large number of light helicopters. India's nuclear forces require the Agni-III missile and nuclear powered submarines with suitable ballistic missiles to acquire genuine deterrent capability. The armed forces do not have a truly integrated C4I2SR system suitable for modern network-centric warfare, which will allow them to optimise their individual capabilities.

All of these high-priority acquisitions will require extensive budgetary support. With the defence budget languishing at less than two per cent of India's GDP – compared with China's 3.5 per cent and Pakistan's 4.5 per cent plus US military aid – it

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will not be possible for the armed forces to undertake any meaningful modernisation in the foreseeable future. Leave aside genuine military modernisation that will substantially enhance combat capabilities, the funds available on the capital account at present are inadequate to suffice even for the replacement of obsolete weapons systems and equipment that are still in service well beyond their useful life cycles. The central police and para-military forces (CPMFs) also need to be modernised as they are facing increasingly more potent threats while being equipped with obsolescent weapons.

The government must also immediately appoint a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or a permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee to provide single-point advice to the CCS on military matters, along with the simultaneous establishment of theatre commands. Any further delay in these key structural reforms in higher defence management on the grounds of the lack of political consensus and the inability of the armed forces to agree on the issue will be extremely detrimental to India's interests in the light of the dangerous developments taking place in India's neighbourhood. The logical next step would be to constitute tri-Service integrated theatre commands to synergise the capabilities and the combat potential of individual Services. It is time to set up a tri-service Aerospace and Cyber Command as well as a Special Forces Command to meet emerging challenges in these fields and to better manage all available resources. A tri-Service Logistics and Maintenance command has also been long overdue. International experience shows that such reform has to be imposed from the top down and can never work if the government keeps waiting for it to come about from the bottom up.

III CONCLUSIONS

The softer issues that do not impinge immediately on planning and preparation for meeting national security challenges must never be ignored as these can have adverse repercussions on the morale of the officers and men in uniform in the long term. The numerous anomalies created by the implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission report must be speedily resolved. In fact, the ham-handed handling of this issue has led to a dangerous "them versus us" civil-military divide and the government must make it a priority to bridge this gap quickly.

The ex-Servicemen too have had a raw deal and have been surrendering their medals and holding fasts for justice to get justice for their legitimate demand of "one rank-one pension". One rank-one pension is an idea whose time has come and it must be implemented without further delay and without appointing any more committees of bureaucrats to look into the issue. While a Department of Ex-servicemen's Welfare has been created in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in keeping with the UPA's Common Minimum Programme, till recently there wasn't a single ex-Serviceman in it. Such measures do not generate confidence among serving soldiers and retired veterans in the civilian leadership. Finally, rather unbelievably, India is still without a National War Memorial.

Views expressed are author's own.

PRIORITY MEASURES

- Formulate a comprehensive National Security Strategic (NSS), after undertaking a strategic defence review.
- The government must immediately appoint a Chief of Defence Staff to head the defence planning function and provide single point military advice to the Cabinet Committee on Security.
- Approve LTIPP 2007-22, the long-term integrated perspective plan of the armed forces, and the ongoing Defence Plan 2007-12, now in its fifth and final year.
- The defence budget must be enhanced in stages to 3.0 per cent of the GDP for meaningful defence modernisation and for upgrading the present military strategy of dissuasion against China to deterrence.
- The long-pending defence procurement plans such as C4I2SR, artillery modernisation, the acquisition of modern fighter aircraft and aircraft carriers and submarines must be hastened.
- Modernisation plans of the central para-military and police forces must also be given the attention that they deserve.
- Anomalies created by the Sixth Pay Commission have led to a civil-military divide and must be redressed early, including acceptance of the ex-Servicemen's legitimate demand for one rank-one pension.
- A national War Memorial must be constructed at a suitable high-visibility spot in New Delhi to honour the memory of all those soldiers, sailors and airmen who have made the supreme sacrifice in the service of India.