
Enhancing Intelligence Assessment and Coordination at National Level

Manoj Shrivastava

Many of the most notorious political, military, and national security failures in history are also examples of the failure to make effective use of available intelligence. A common feature of many major political catastrophes, from the fall of Troy to the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist strike, is that the information indicating an imminent threat was misunderstood, lost, or ignored. In most cases of intelligence failure, the information was available, but the intelligence agencies failed in making a holistic assessment. Coordination at the national level has a scope for improvement. The day-to-day functioning of intelligence agencies is satisfactory but most of the information shared by them is vague, lacks specificity and time-frames, and does not lead to any relevant assessment. It is imperative for us to make an in-depth analysis of such assessment and coordination failures and draw up a roadmap for long-term plans to improve our intelligence assessment and coordination at the national level. We need to outline where we are today, where we need to go, what desirable end product we should have, and, finally, how to get there.

Intelligence Failure in 1962

The 1962 Indo-China War is one of the most apt case studies of intelligence failure due to wrong and pre-conceived intelligence assessment. The Intelligence Bureau

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(IB) which was the only intelligence agency worth its name at that time prepared periodic assessments of Chinese dispositions, movements, strength and build-up and forwarded them directly to the government. IB at that time was responsible for both internal as well as external intelligence and it took upon itself the task of assessment while sidelining the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). Much of the information provided by the agencies was assimilated in a manner that fit with their preconceptions. The political leadership and IB fell into the trap of “mirror imaging” wherein both believed the view of the other which coincided with their own view that the Chinese would not react sharply to Indian moves and would not like to escalate the situation. Post incident analysis has revealed that the intelligence was available but we failed in making the correct assessment.¹

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Kargil

During the summer of 1999, India and Pakistan fought a 10-week limited war in Kargil, a remote area of Kashmir. There were four intelligence agencies involved in the intelligence process relevant to this debacle, namely, the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), Military Intelligence (MI), Intelligence Bureau (IB) and, finally, Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). These agencies, in some form or the other, had assessed a likely attempt by Pakistan but they failed in predicting the specific form in which it would be enacted. They did not consider the possibility of Pakistani miscalculation. R&AW erred in assessing the political and economic compulsions of Pakistan while MI thought that any such misadventure by Pakistan in that area wouldn't be logistically sustainable.

The *Kargil Review Committee Report*, published in 2000, noticed serious deficiencies at various levels of the intelligence collection and operational process and in the coordinated sharing of inputs.² The JIC which was responsible for overall assessment, failed to connect the dots. Much of the information provided by the agencies was assimilated in a manner that fit with their preconceptions. The function of intelligence agencies is not merely to inform, but to assess. But the evidence gathered by the Kargil Review Committee shows that intelligence was available; what was missing was the assessment.

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Terrorists Strike in Hinterland

Post-incident analysis of almost all recent terrorist attacks in the hinterland, whether Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, New Delhi or Malegaon, has revealed that information of impending attacks was available with the intelligence agencies or their subsidiaries but we as a nation couldn't prevent these incidents. A huge volume of information of generic nature was collected by the intelligence agencies but they couldn't make the correct assessment. In some cases, the assessment was

correct but we couldn't coordinate a timely response.

The terrorist strike on November 26, 2008, at Mumbai, the economic capital of India, that resulted in the killing of 164 people and wounding of at least 308, once again exposed the chink in the Indian security armour. Most analysts felt that it was a clear-cut case of intelligence coordination failure. The agencies had apparently issued a stream of warnings in the months preceding the attacks: the latest one being given as late as November 18, 2008. However, they failed to look for indicators for a likely event and connect the dots to draw the complete picture and take the requisite measures to prevent the incidents. The generic information of a likely terrorist strike was available with the intelligence agencies but they either ignored it or lacked an imaginative mind to make the correct assessment from these inputs. Even generic information was reluctantly shared and the coordination needed to make a holistic assessment was lacking.

From the above case studies, it clearly emerges that there was ample information available with the intelligence agencies regarding a likely attack, but they failed to make a holistic assessment. In many cases, they did make an imaginative and correct assessment but they failed to coordinate this assessment before approaching the decision-makers. The paradigm shift in the nature of national security challenges that the country is facing today has to be acknowledged. An effective response to any unforeseen security challenge necessitates three prongs, namely, intelligence, decision-maker and reaction elements who respond to the produced intelligence to remain in the same grid and work as a team, to read the situation continuously and react within the shortest possible time. Even today, the intelligence gathering and assessment-making infrastructure, decision-maker and reaction element have not been meshed into one single point of contact which could have reduce the reaction

time of our response to any such attack

An endeavour has been made here to analyse the impediments to holistic intelligence assessment and coordination, along with an attempt to make some recommendations to fill the gaps. Improvement in intelligence assessment and coordination would ultimately improve our reaction to any unforeseen security challenge.

Impediments to Correct Assessment and Coordination

Tactical military intelligence collected by any agency should be shared immediately with the local formation headquarters, enabling it to act on it immediately.

Plethora of Intelligence Agencies and Their “Turf War”³

We have a number of intelligence agencies functioning in the country today which necessitates a high degree of coordination amongst them. R&AW, IB, MI, Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), JIC/National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), Multi-Agency Centre (MAC), National Investigation Agency (NIA) are among the agencies involved in various stages of the intelligence process besides the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), and Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Delhi Police. Today, almost every paramilitary and police force has its own intelligence network. The sharing of intelligence has a scope for improvement. Ideally, tactical military intelligence collected by any agency should be shared immediately with the local formation headquarters, enabling it to act on it immediately.

The volume of information collated by various agencies and that available from open sources is enormous; more than 80 percent of such information is available from open sources. Processing, evaluation and dissemination of this voluminous data is a huge task. These agencies are reluctant to share actionable intelligence with each other. But superfluous information of generic information is definitely shared with other agencies, leading to information overload and making the task of assessment-making and coordination more difficult.⁴ While the charter of the agencies has been, by and large, well defined, undue obsession by them over their sphere of activities sometimes leads to a loss of focus wherein the overall objective of safeguarding the national interests is sidelined to promote one’s own agency. The “Turf War” has, at times, been noticed even amongst the ministries controlling the intelligence agencies such as the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO — R&AW), Ministry

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of Home Affairs (IB), Ministry of Defence (DGMI/ DIA) and Ministry of External Affairs, which have been detrimental to national interests.

Quality of Manpower and Lack of Suitable Supervisory Mechanism

The job of an analyst is looked upon with contempt within the intelligence agencies. Everyone wants to work in an operational role due to the glamour attached to it. In any case, intelligence is not a lucrative job in India except when people come into it to look after their own interests. Prior to the Kargil War, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) was tasked to coordinate the assessment from all the intelligence agencies, but it did not have the requisite authority over any of the agencies, which made the whole system futile. The meetings of

the JIC were attended by lower rank officers and every agency wanted to report directly to the apex level political authority, the prime minister. The JIC was merged with the National Security Council (NSC) and was made a Secretariat of the NSC in 1999, as per recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee. However, it lacks appropriate authority and each agency continues to report to its own political controllers, thereby causing the lack in making a holistic assessment. A coordinating agency without the requisite authority and universal acceptance cannot achieve its target. Other important recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee have not been fully implemented by the government till today.⁵

Lack of Accountability and Loss of Focus

This is another important aspect, given a short shrift by citing secrecy, leading to loss of efficiency. A greater degree of transparency without sacrificing national security also needs to be defined. The identification and interpretation of a threat is essentially a political activity. The possibility that intelligence information will be distorted by political bias is present at every stage of the intelligence process. It is the primary responsibility of the intelligence agencies to advise its political bosses for making a correct assessment. Intelligence agencies should continue to maintain their apolitical orientation.

Overreliance on Technical Intelligence (TECHINT)

Overreliance on technical intelligence has blunted the sharp edge of intelligence operatives. Enough emphasis is still not being paid to sharpening the skills of human intelligence (HUMINT). The databases of NATGRID, whenever completed, can be a useful tool but the assessment cannot be left to the computers.

Recommendations

National Resolve to Accord Priority to Intelligence: The task of the intelligence agencies, whether handling external or internal intelligence, is extremely demanding and testing. Honestly speaking, intelligence has never been given its due priority. In the words of Lt. Gen. R. K. Sawhney (Retd), former director general military intelligence (DGMI), "In India, intelligence is unfortunately treated with contempt; it is taken for granted and is misused. For intelligence agencies, there are only users not enablers." A national consensus has to be reached through various means to accord the requisite priority to intelligence and treat it as a special activity. The intelligence agencies should be provided with adequate budgetary support to ensure optimal functioning.

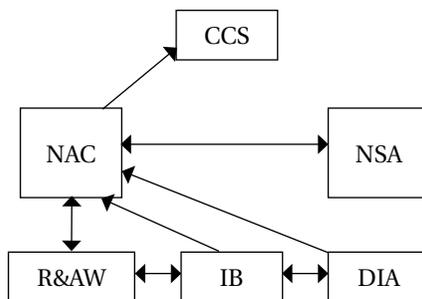
*Intelligence Reforms*⁶

It is high time that an Indian intelligence reform commission is appointed on the lines of the administrative reform commission to overhaul the ongoing system. Intelligence has become the first line of defence. The first reform should be to give intelligence the backing of legislative enactments. The law should provide a degree of autonomy which frees intelligence from bureaucratic restraints, controls relating to financial management, administrative functions, and so on. Laws should also hold intelligence accountable to an oversight committee. It is recommended that selected appointments in Parliament such as of the speaker, leader of the opposition party, and members of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) should constitute a Parliamentary Standing Committee on the intelligence set-up which should periodically review the functioning of the intelligence agencies and review their budget allotment without jeopardising national security to exercise the requisite control over the intelligence agencies.

National Intelligence Authority: There is a need to appoint an appropriate nodal agency enjoying acceptance from all agencies. It should be based on the principle of primacy of intelligence and establish a rule of accountability. The others will automatically follow and minor issues can be refined. A recommended model is as under:

- Only three intelligence agencies namely IB (internal security), R&AW (external and strategic) and DIA (defence and technical) with their formalised charter of duties ratified by legislation in Parliament to be allowed to operate. Intelligence agencies of the paramilitary forces and the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) to be amalgamated into DIA.
- A National Assessment Council (NAC) to be nominated which would consist of the directors of IB, R&AW and DIA immediately on retirement, with the requisite support staff. It could take a holistic view of all intelligence from different sources, evaluate accuracy, synthesise to obtain a cohesive picture, and arrive at a final assessment after discussion amongst the three members. The NAC would have the powers of a judicial committee ratified by the legislation of Parliament, and would be briefed on a weekly basis by the directors of IB, R&AW and DIA. The NAC can summarily ask for additional information from the intelligence agencies and it would be obligatory for them to comply with the directions of the NAC.
- The NAC and National Security Adviser (NSA) would be at par, who in consultation with each other, would advise the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). The three members of NAC would have equal powers and would be personally represented in all meetings.
- A Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) to be appointed immediately after discussing various models amongst the political parties. He would invariably attend the meetings of the CCS to bring about synergy among assessment-makers, decision-makers and reaction elements who respond to the produced intelligence.

Fig 1: Recommended Intelligence Assessment and Coordination Mechanism at National Level



Improving Quality of Human and Technical Resources: The tapping of suitable human resources for the intelligence agencies cannot be overemphasised. We have to select the best and brightest people, including experts from other walks of life who can do “out of the box” thinking. Technical savvy personnel are also needed in these agencies to exploit the boom in technology. Gone are the days, when intelligence was extremely secretive, functioning in isolation. Today, nothing is classified information except your adversary’s mind. One has to learn to analyse and reason in order to read the adversary’s mind. Cross-pollination between military and civil intelligence agencies would improve the quality of assessment and coordination. There is a requirement of military intelligence personnel, including air and naval intelligence, to have interaction with, and exposure to, a civil intelligence agency. Similarly, there is also a requirement for civil intelligence personnel to have exposure to the military intelligence agency.

We have to provide long tenures to intelligence personnel to maintain continuity.⁷ Similar incentives are being offered to intelligence agencies in the USA.⁸ Intelligence assumes even more relevance with our present disputed borders with Pakistan and China, as we need quicker assessment, making use of human as well as technical intelligence. As India is developing at a faster rate, intelligence should get more importance. The same can be done if the intelligence agencies are well looked after and have a proper redressal system in their own set-up.

However, in the present circumstances, we need intelligence analysts more than just intelligence operatives. The analysts should be given long tenures to focus on their specialisation to maintain continuity, which can be very demanding. Personnel selected for intelligence tasks, therefore, should have an aptitude and flair for the job. The army intelligence officers should go to R&AW and come back to the army to pass on their experiences. Training and grooming of intelligence personnel need improvement and their morale should be kept high. Language experts must be hired to facilitate the task of the intelligence agencies. Bright officers should be selected for deputation to other intelligence agencies like R&AW—this would facilitate improved inter-agency coordination. We can explore the South African model of rotation of intelligence personnel to enhance the scope the intelligence coordination. The involvement of the “beat constable” /local police has been eroded in recent time and needs to be rejuvenated. Local police should be incorporated in intelligence improvement.

Training

One of the prime measures to improve inter-agency coordination is to have a common training facility for intelligence personnel.⁹ Common training can be conducted at a national institute / academy of intelligence which an intelligence operative would join after undergoing his basic training in his parent institute. Common training will foster better inter-personal relations amongst intelligence operatives and improve inter-agency coordination. It will also resolve the various issues of a “turf war “and will provide an opportunity to understand the methods and capabilities of each intelligence agency.

National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID)

A project to centralise data from multiple sources for better intelligence analysis was announced after 26/11. Setting up of the NATGRID, which was approved by the CCS in November 2010, should be expedited as it would ease the pressure of information overload on the intelligence agencies as the sharing will become faster and automated. The information can be accessed by different users on a need to know basis which can be controlled by the software. The grid, when established, would facilitate better synergy amongst the intelligence agencies as it would make possible exchange of information amongst security agencies across the country.

Public-Private Partnership¹⁰

We must take advantage of the advancement in management techniques in the corporate sector to improve intelligence management. For example, JASON is an independent scientific advisory group that provides consulting services to the US government on matters of defence science and technology. It has conducted a number of studies even for US intelligence agencies and most of its reports are unclassified. It is recommended that we must make use of various private institutions and think-tanks for analytical study of national and security issues. This was being done during the time of Rajiv Gandhi but was discontinued later, for unknown reasons. We have to be cautious of turf wars even among professional institutions or think-tanks. At the same time, for think-tanks to participate freely, they should have access to intelligence. Outsourcing of selected analytical tasks can be done to tap the potential of experts in other walks of life. Filtered inputs, without jeopardising security issues should be made available to the think-tanks and experts in their fields albeit not part of the intelligence mechanism.

Tapping the Potential of Defence Attachés

A major portion of holistic assessment can be extracted from defence attachés since they interact with various forums in the country of their posting. Unfortunately, their potential has never been exploited in our country. The Military of External Affairs (MEA) should also share the intelligence which comes to it from diplomatic channels with the appropriate users.

Conclusion

The report card of the Indian intelligence agencies for the last six decades has been positive when we also take into account their unreported successes, besides noting their failures. From the above case studies of intelligence failures, it amply stands out that there was no dearth of information with the intelligence agencies but they failed to make a holistic assessment. In some cases, they made a fairly accurate assessment but failed in coordinating their efforts in communicating these assessments to the decision-makers. It is unfortunate that intelligence is not accorded its due importance in India. Quality manpower is not yet being pumped into intelligence agencies, hence, they lack imaginative and innovative minds and, in the bargain, fail to connect the dots which is a prerequisite for a making a holistic assessment.

The day-to-day functioning of intelligence agencies is satisfactory but the assessment-making capabilities require fine-tuning. The last few years have witnessed overreliance on TECHINT thereby, leading to stereotype assessments. Enough emphasis is still not being paid to sharpening the skill of human intelligence. The importance of the beat constable and sources from all walks of life has gradually eroded. We have an acute shortage of quality analysts in the intelligence agencies. The performance of analysts is further hampered by their short tenures as they are frequently replaced by people looking for plum postings in their headquarters. The top brass of these agencies lack the vision and focus to avoid 'turf wars' and operate in the overall interest of the nation and the intelligence agencies themselves. Good inter-personal relations amongst the intelligence operatives has at times produced the desired results but has not been

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exploited to its full potential. The committees/supervisory mechanisms instituted to make overall assessments lack the requisite authority and universal acceptance amongst these agencies, thereby, invariably promote 'turf wars'. The intelligence agencies are being used by politicians as a tool to meet their own selfish ends.

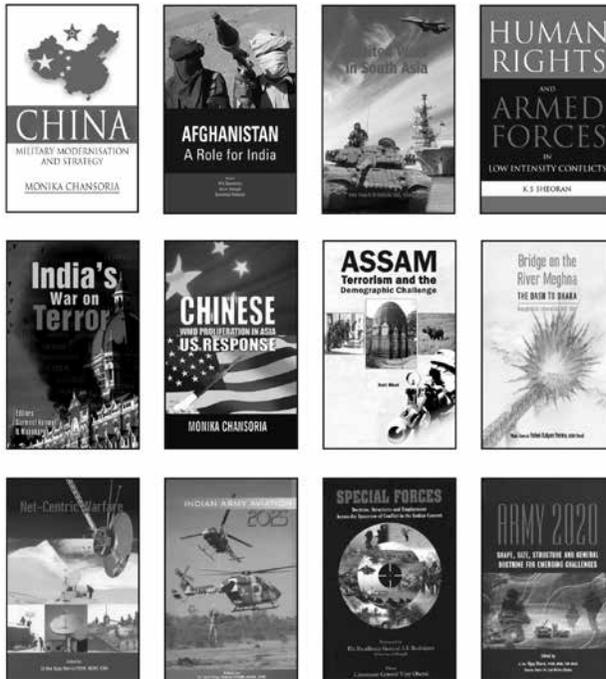
It is once again reiterated that the number of intelligence agencies has to be pruned down, with adequate redundancy to ensure better coordination and economy of effort. It is recommended that the NAC which will be

represented by the expert intelligence fraternity be constituted to make full use of their assessment-making expertise. It will take care of 'turf wars' and ensure a high degree of coordination amongst the intelligence agencies. It is imperative that decision-makers remain in the continuous loop of reading the overall security situation. It is the prime responsibility of the intelligence mechanism to ensure that indicators of any unforeseen eventuality are continuously and correctly read and their holistic assessment is communicated in real-time to decision-makers so that they can take accurate and timely decisions to immediately react to such eventualities. The intelligence gathering and assessment-making mechanism, decision-maker and reaction elements need to be meshed into one single point of contact.

Notes

1. Srinath Raghavan, "Intelligence Failures and Reforms," #599, July 2009, p.3.
2. K Subrahmanyam, *Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report* (New Delhi: Sage, 2000), p.238.
3. Maj Gen VK Singh, *India's External Intelligence –Secrets of Research and Analysis Wing (RAW)*, (Manas Publications ,2007), p.37.
4. CD Sahay, former director, R&AW, during a seminar on "Intelligence Assessment and Coordination at National Level," held at CLAWS on November 24, 2010.
5. Lt Gen R K Sawhney (Retd), former DGMI, during a seminar on "Intelligence Assessment and Coordination at National Level," held at CLAWS in November 24, 2010.
6. Headquarters ARTRAC, "Intelligence Application in Information Age: The Need to Sharpen the Gaze," May 2010.

7. n. 4.
8. Jayadava Ranade, former additional secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, during a seminar on “Intelligence Assessment and Coordination at National Level,” held at CLAWS on November 24, 2010.
9. n. 6.
10. DCNath, former special director, Intelligence Bureau, during a seminar on “Intelligence Assessment and Coordination at National Level,” held at CLAWS November 24, 2010.



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