
Debating Defence Reforms Since Kargil

Vinod Anand

The Kargil conflict was instrumental in delivering a strategic shock to our politico-military establishment that led to ushering in a host of defence forms. While some impetus was imparted in implementation of the suggested defence reforms in the initial stages, after a while, the pace of reforms floundered against the ossified and inertial nature of our bureaucratic approach to matters pertaining to defence of the realm. A certain degree of stasis had set in when another strategic jolt in the shape of the Mumbai terror attacks hit us in the face. Increasing the defence budget for 2009-10 by an uncharacteristic 34 percent, looking again for an overarching structure for coordination and dissemination of intelligence, stressing the need for a unified concept of command again, the need for regulating the media, besides introduction of a number of other measures to spruce up our defence and security structures post-Mumbai was, in fact, a recognition by our government that we had been remiss in many ways in implementing defence and security reforms, in both letter and spirit, as recommended by the Group of Ministers (GoM) in 2001. The GoM had included in its report almost all the measures which are now sought to be undertaken as a consequence of the Mumbai massacre.

The government had constituted a GoM in April 2000 to review the national security system in its entirety and in particular to consider the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) and formulate specific proposals for implementation. Review by the GoM had been carried out in the areas of internal security, border management, intelligence apparatus and management of defence. The GoM's main recommendations regarding management of defence included creation of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) with a designated defence staff with a

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view to establish synergy and promote jointness among the armed forces, creation of a Defence Procurement Board (DPB), a Defence R&D Board, preparation of a holistic and integrated defence perspective plan for 15 years, establishment of a National Defence University and effective media management. In addition, establishment of the tri-Service Andaman & Nicobar Islands Command and Strategic Forces Command, integration of Service Headquarters with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) were the other important measures recommended. The basic purpose was to bring about improvements in organisations, structures and processes through integration of civil and military components and promote synergy and jointness amongst the armed forces. Except for the recommendation of creation of the CDS, which was deferred till political consensus from all political parties could be obtained, all other recommendations had been approved for implementation by the government.

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This paper analyses the degree and extent of the implementation of defence reforms recommended by the GoM, particularly with reference to the mission and objectives of the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) besides examining the status and evaluation of other reforms related to management of defence having a bearing on the functioning and goals of HQ IDS.

The Vision Statement of HQ IDS highlights its role to “*act as a point organisation for jointmanship in MoD which integrates policy, doctrine, war-fighting and procurement by employing best management practices*”. While HQ IDS has made considerable progress in achieving some goals of its vision statement during over seven years of its existence, there are other areas where the progress has been very little or it has been excruciatingly slow.

Integration with MoD

The KRC had observed that India is perhaps the only major democracy where the armed forces headquarters are outside the apex government structure. It had pointed out that “most opposition to change comes from the inadequate knowledge of the national security decision-making process elsewhere in the world and a reluctance to change the status quo... In fact, locating the Services Headquarters in the Government will further enhance civilian supremacy”.

However, even though Services HQ have been given the titles, for instance, of Integrated HQ of the army and so on, the integration of either HQ IDS or other Services HQ is only in form rather than in substance. HQ IDS largely remains outside the MoD. Even the GoM had indicated the problems which have been arising out of considering the Services HQ as attached offices; problems of *inter se* relativities, multiple, duplicated and complex procedures governing the exercise of administrative and financial powers; and the concept of advice to the minister, have all contributed to problems in the management of defence.

After a lapse of almost seven years, the MoD candidly admitted before the Standing Committee on Defence in February 2009, “Renaming of Army and Naval Headquarters as Integrated Headquarters is merely cosmetic, in the absence of posting of DoD cadre officers to Service Headquarters and vice versa, for participation in policy formulation.”¹

The MoD has also admitted that postings of officers from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA); Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and intelligence agencies to appointments created in unified organisations have not been carried out so far. However, the question that arises is: how is this situation going to be remedied or is there any will to rectify this major flaw in the functioning of the MoD? A long time back, Jaswant Singh, a former defence minister, had stated in his book *Defending India* that the MoD, in effect, becomes the principal destroyer of the cutting edge of military morale — ironic, considering that very reverse of it is their responsibility. The sword arm of the state gets blunted by the state.

COSC vs CDS: The Unending Debate

The Hamletian dilemma of the CDS ‘to be or not to be’ persists in our politico-military establishment despite the recommendations of the KRC, GoM and Standing Committee on Defence (SCD). In fact, looking at the stance of both current and the previous government, the SCD had given up reminding the government, after having remonstrated with it continuously till its Twenty-Second Report of 2006-07 on the subject. But, in the wake of the Mumbai massacre which brought to the fore many deficiencies in our national security structures and processes, the SCD was again constrained to observe in February 2009 the dire need for the CDS. The SCD noted that the committee is unable to comprehend whether the present system would prove efficacious enough to ensure quick response and coordinated action in emergent situations. Therefore,

The Committee are of the considered view that the creation of CDS to act as Chairman of the COSC is essential to ensure optimum level of jointness among the different wings of the Armed Forces and to provide single-point military advice to the Government...The Committee are of the firm view that till such time the post of CDS is created, the Government may take steps to give appropriate authority to the Chairman COSC in the present set-up to command and control the resources of the Defence Services whenever the situation so demands.²

The merits of putting in place the institution of CDS are too well known to bear repetition again. Awaiting a political consensus has become a *mantra* to procrastinate and avoid creation of the CDS. It is too early to say whether the new government, after the forthcoming elections, would be serious in moving towards creation of the CDS.

Processes for evolving a national security strategy leading to the formulation of a Defence Policy Guidance and evolution of a National Military Strategy are still in the nascent stage.

Integrated/Tri-Service Commands

Setting up of the Strategic Forces Command and the tri-Service Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) has been considered as a symbol of the three Services working jointly in operational matters. Yet, the concept of Integrated and Unified Commands beyond these two structures has not found ready acceptance as the Services have been reluctant to adjust to each other's demands. Further, even in the HQ ANC, besides the continuing deficiency of civilian staff since the inception of this organisation, there are water-tight compartments as to how the resources of a particular Service can be used, thus, restricting the flexibility and command of the ANC's commander. The desired level of synergy in the ANC is missing. The Standing Committee on Defence had observed that the senior officers of the command can issue orders to the personnel belonging to their respective forces only. There is no jointness of command and control. The committee felt that this was a very serious lacuna and earnest efforts should be made to correct it immediately.³ The committee had also recommended in its Twenty-Second Report circa 2006-07 that coast guard services may also be inter-connected with the jointness of command and control of the three Services but it needed a Mumbai terror attack to force the issue⁴.

Integrated Perspective Planning and Force Development

One of the fundamentals of the IDS has been to evolve an integrated perspective plan for the development of the armed forces in consonance with the rapidly changing strategic environment coupled with a common appreciation of the threat perceptions. Processes for evolving a national security strategy leading to the formulation of a Defence Policy Guidance and evolution of a National Military Strategy are still in the nascent stage. A well thought out Defence and Military Capability Plan flowing out from these processes which would be iterative and interactive in nature between various components of the MoD and other national security organs and agencies of the government would result in a systematic development of our armed forces which could respond to a whole array of multiple spectrum threats.

A draft National Security Strategy (NSS) has been prepared and is doing the rounds of various ministries and organs of the government. It is expected that the NSS would be finalised by end December 2009, based on the commitment given to the SCD. Further, the Long-Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) covering the period 2007-22 is expected to be finalised by end October 2009. Earlier, the exercise for the preparation of LTIPP 2002-17 was abandoned since a large portion of the period of the 10th Five-Year Defence Plan (2002-2007) had elapsed without its approval. The current LTIPP covers the three Five-Year Defence Plan (FYPD) periods of 11th, 12th and 13th Plans.

Disjunctions in the planning process are fairly obvious. First, the so-called integrated Defence Plans are only an amalgamation of the respective Services plans; they can be hardly described as 'integrated'. Even though the IDS has a mandate to allot not only inter-Service priorities but also intra-Service priorities, it lacks the authority to force the issue. In the COSC, every Service chief has to look after the interest of his own Service and if at all a Service plan's priority has to be changed, it has to be based on a consensus, which is a rare occurrence. That is why the SCD in its latest report, has recommended, as an interim measure, empowering the chairman of the COSC with additional authority for such tasks till the creation of the CDS. Second, the FYDPs are being evolved without the benefit of a common threat perception, a well articulated NSS, and in the absence of a DPG or Directive of the Raksha Mantri (RM). Ideally, a DPG or a RM's Directive for the 11th Plan should have been issued before the commencement of the plan, that is, in 2006, but that has not been done even after two years into the plan. And if the threat scenarios have undergone a change in the meanwhile, a review of DPG/RM's Directive would have become necessary. But, as mentioned earlier in

the paper, formulation of such processes is still in their infancy even seven years since the need was identified.

The KRC and GoM, in order to ensure the effectiveness of the planning exercise, had recommended that the Defence Minister's Directive should be issued at least 12 months before the commencement of the next Five-Year Plan. This was expected to form the conceptual basis for the Defence Plan. Both reports also recommended that the Ministry of Finance (MoF) should give a firm indication of the availability of financial resources, for a period of five years, at least six months before the commencement of the ensuing Five-Year Plan. But such recommendations have been ignored and not implemented in the absence of any statutory provisions to force the issue.

The absence of firm indications of budgetary resources available for Five-Year Defence Plans is a major lacuna that bedevils the planning process.

The absence of firm indications of budgetary resources available for Five-Year Defence Plans is a major lacuna that bedevils the planning process. The MoF generally advises the MoD to add about 10 percent to the previous budget in an incremental manner which obviously has no relation to developing defence capabilities in a time-bound manner based on the FYPDs. The Parliament's Standing Committee on Defence, in its 16th Report (released in April 2007), felt constrained to remark that "*the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Defence should not shift the responsibility to each other; rather, together they must approve the Eleventh Plan at the earliest, so that it does not face the same fate as the Tenth Plan. This will further facilitate both the Ministry of Defence to plan their finance, equipment acquisition and utilise the allocated amount to the fullest extent in a time-bound manner.*" The committee was also perturbed because of the mismatch between the projection and budgetary allocation for the first year (2007-08) of the plan.

Further, according approval to Defence Plans before they commence and giving a broad allotment of funds was recommended by the Kargil Committee and GoM. However, the 10th FYPD lapsed without getting approved. This also led to abandoning of LTIPP 2002-17. A fresh LTIPP (2007-22) focussing on the joint conventional edge, capabilities to be achieved, aspects of commonality of equipment; inter-Service prioritisation and indigenisation has been prepared to cover the 11th, 12th and 13th Plan periods. Further, work on LTIPP (2012-27) has also

commenced. But, it needs to be noted that 11th Five-Year Defence Plan (2007-12) which should have been approved by the government before its commencement has not been approved so far⁵. Great hopes are being placed that, at least, by the end of the current financial year, the 11th FYPD, if not the LTIPP, would be approved based on the NSS and DPG which are likely to be formulated by the end of this year.

As far as integration of the Defence Plans with those of DRDO is concerned, HQ IDS claims that it has carried out an analysis of DRDO's 11th *Plan and a sincere effort to synchronise it with the Services 11th Defence Plan has been made*. No prizes for guessing whether the effort has been satisfactory or otherwise.

Matters are further compounded by delays in procuring the requirements of the defence forces. This is despite creation of new structures for acquisition at the levels of the MoD and HQ IDS. The introduction of new Defence Procurement Procedures in 2005, 2006 and again revised in 2008 has not smoothed or hastened the acquisition process. Because of the delays in acquisitions, a portion of capital funds earmarked in the annual defence budget have been surrendered for the last several years. Thus, increasing the defence budget by 34 percent for the current financial year would be of no avail if it cannot be spent fully and usefully.

Doctrine, Organisation and Training

In the sphere of imparting impetus to the process of jointness and maximising synergies among the three Services, there has been steady progress though it can also be said that a lot more needs to be done. Within the HQ IDS, there is a great degree of zeal to implement measures to inculcate jointness and integration but many bureaucratic obstacles and road blocks, both within the military as well as civil dispensation, need to be overcome before a meaningful substance can be added to the defence reforms.

Formulation of a number of joint doctrines and concepts has been one of the major achievements of IDS towards ushering in the unified thought processes amongst the Services. In May 2006, then Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee had unveiled the first-ever joint doctrine of the armed forces, laying stress on synergy, development of joint war-fighting capability and keeping pace with technology⁶. Preparation of the joint doctrine is considered a most important step in preparing the armed forces for conducting joint war-fighting. Formulation of the joint doctrine also highlights the fact that no single Service can individually achieve the military objectives in the contemporary security scene and the complex nature of threats facing India.

In addition to the Joint Doctrine for Defence Forces, the Joint Amphibious Warfare Doctrine has also been released whereas the Joint Special Forces Doctrine, Joint Psychological Operations Doctrine, Joint Sub-Conventional Warfare Doctrine and a Doctrine for Maritime Operations are said to be in advance stages of preparation. Further, HQ IDS has been nominated as the tri-Service single window for interaction in space by all agencies, including external ones. An Integrated Space Cell has been established to coordinate space issues and formulate a Joint Space Doctrine.

A tri-Services body on Information Warfare Directorate of Information Warfare & Information Technology had been formed in 2003 under the HQ IDS to take up the issues of information warfare (IW) at the tri-Service level. A Joint Information Warfare Doctrine was formulated by this directorate to serve as the base document for IW activities. A Defence Information Warfare Agency (DIWA) was raised to look after the strategic and other IW needs of the three Services. The agency was later rechristened the Defence Information Assurance and Research Agency (DIARA). Certain elements of IW are also being dealt with by the Defence Intelligence Agency while the major portion of those relating to IW missions is being looked after by DIARA under the Joint Operations branch of the IDS. DIARA has been providing military inputs through the Chief of Integrated Staff Committee to the National Security Council and the National Information Board which coordinate the joint and integrated effort at the national level. At the national level, a Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) exists to evolve suitable responses to cyber attacks. Services are also coordinating their efforts, through constituting similar teams at their own level, for instance, CERT-A established by the army. These measures indicate a movement towards achieving an enhanced degree of jointness.

Another step to promote joint thought among the Services and security community was the creation of the Indian National Defence University (INDU). The Concept of INDU is based on similar institutions existing in countries like the US and China. The INDU is expected to be a multi-disciplinary “centre of excellence” in the country in education and research on national security issues. Consequently, it was to be established by an Act of Parliament. The recommendations also included

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the provision for the establishment of a War Gaming and Simulation Centre. But after seven years of acceptance of recommendations, INDU has not fructified. Even though funds for INDU have been earmarked and Haryana has offered land for the purpose, no meaningful progress has been made in this regard. This can be contrasted with Pakistan having announced in March 2007 that it would create a National Defence University and by March 2008 the same was inaugurated.

A Centre for Joint Warfare Studies has been formed in September 2007 under the aegis of HQ IDS to promote jointmanship among the Services, ministries and intelligence agencies connected with national security. It will conduct studies and research work in joint war-fighting. In addition, it will conduct orientation courses/ capsules for various ministries/agencies (including procurement agencies) connected with HQ IDS/Services.

Coordinating and Unifying Intelligence Efforts

The Mumbai terror attacks have again revealed the flaws in our intelligence set-up. Timely intelligence, even when available in some kind of vague and diffused form, does not filter down to the consumers who are most concerned with it. The KRC had recommended creation of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the expansion of its charter. The KRC has observed, "It is not quite appreciated in India that the primary responsibility for collecting external intelligence including that relating to potential adversaries ...is vested in R&AW. The Directorate General of Defence Intelligence (DGMI's) capability for intelligence collection is limited. . . Unfortunately, the R&AW facility in the Kargil area did not receive adequate attention in terms of staff or technological capability. The Indian threat assessment has been largely a single track process dominated by R&AW. In most advanced countries, the Armed Forces have a Defence Intelligence Agency with a significant intelligence collection capability. This ensures that there are two streams of intelligence which enables governments to check one against the other." (Kargil Review Committee) (Report Para 13.31 & 13.40.)

Even though the DIA has been created under the aegis of HQ IDS and has been functioning well, its scope and corresponding resources have not been expanded upon. The SCD in its Action Taken Report of April 2007 had again recommended to the government that sufficient funds should be made available to the armed forces for the purpose as recommended by the Subrahmanyam Committee. Many other inadequacies of intelligence sharing and deficiencies of requisite resources were highlighted by the KRC which have not been addressed in the intervening years.

The National Security Council Secretariat was tasked to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the GoM's report, including the intelligence apparatus. Increased incidence of terror attacks, Naxalite activities, illegal migration and increased narcotic traffic is a reflection of the reality that the intelligence community needs to do more to deliver. Some progress has been made by establishing Multi-Agency Centres to coordinate intelligence efforts. An Intelligence Coordination Group and also the National Intelligence Board have been created. A Joint Task Force on Intelligence has been put in place to identify the training requirements of a specialist nature for a particular type of threat in different states and for training their personnel. For enhancing the technical surveillance capabilities, a

National Technical Research Organisation has been created. But, sadly, the Indian intelligence community had to depend upon the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for analysing the forensic evidence of technical nature obtained during the Mumbai massacre.

Unfortunately, the R&AW facility in the Kargil area did not receive adequate attention in terms of staff or technological capability. The Indian threat assessment has been largely a single track process dominated by R&AW.

Media Operations and Perception Management

The KRC had made a number of recommendations on media relations which ranged from improving interface with the media to instituting new organisations at various levels and also framing rules of business/guidelines for sharing information and covering events of a sensitive nature. In the absence of any substantive framework for reporting, the media was instrumental in undermining the ongoing counter-terrorist operations against the Mumbai terrorists. When a Bill in the Parliament was to be introduced to regulate the media for such eventualities, a concerted action by media leaders prevailed upon the government to allow the media self-regulation. However, this concept of self-regulation needs to be revisited and guidelines for the media evolved after taking into account the concerns of all the stakeholders.

Managing or shaping perceptions, though frequently talked about, is an area that has received little or no attention. Though generally considered a euphemism for psychological warfare, it has much more significance in the

context of the current knowledge age when the target audience or intended audience is being bombarded with an overload of information through a multitude of media. The need for perception management has been emphasised in our Counter-Insurgency Doctrine and even the Ministry of Home Affairs has recognised its importance in its annual reports. Yet, suitable structures, processes and mechanisms, along with the necessary resources, have not been evolved. The concept also does not have any doctrinal and institutional support. Existing organisations within the armed forces have old antiquated structures and resources suited to carrying out some elements of psychological warfare. While an organisation similar to the Strategic Communications Office of the US at the top of the hierarchy, along with structures at lower levels, could be a guide, we need to evolve such an organisation suited to Indian requirements and conditions. Some successes on the perception warfare front were achieved when a High Power Committee was instituted before the commencement of the Indo-Pak War of 1971 that resulted in the liberation of Bangladesh. However, the committee to coordinate the efforts in this area was disbanded thereafter and the KRC has also overlooked this important force multiplier even though it has laid emphasis on improving media relations. But, it is much more than that.

Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing, it can be said that while a number of recommendations of the KRC report and GoM's reports have been implemented, some of the key recommendations which would have improved jointness and integration amongst the armed forces remain to be implemented in a meaningful manner. The integration of the IDS and Services into the MoD is only in form and lacks any real substance, with even bureaucrats accepting that integration is only 'cosmetic'. The defence planning process which should have taken off after the creation of IDS continues to suffer from a number of infirmities. The problems of linkages of FYDP with budgetary resources and procurement/acquisition plans continue year after year despite introduction of a series of new Defence Procurement Procedures. Many flaws which ailed our defence management before Kargil, continue to prevail even after the Mumbai terror attacks. Lack of unified and coordinated intelligence effort that was one of the glaring weaknesses revealed during Kargil, revisited us during the Mumbai massacre.

Therefore, the time has again come to take stock of our defence set-up and move towards implementing measures already recommended by the KRC

and GoM, in both letter and spirit. But empirical evidence suggests that it would not be an easy task, given a number of contextual inhibiting factors. K Subrahmanyam, the head of the KRC, has recently argued in favour of constituting a Blue Ribbon Commission for the Indian armed forces for looking into their problems in a comprehensive manner. This could be modelled after similar commissions in the US and UK. He observes:

All these issues could be referred to a high powered commission headed by an eminent personality who commands high credibility, like Ratan Tata or Narayanamurty, including retired chiefs of staff from the three Services, retired chairman of the joint intelligence, retired defence and foreign secretaries, eminent management specialists and others. At the same time, it should be clear to the government and Parliament that once such a commission submits its recommendations, there will be no further nitpicking by the committee of secretaries but the report should be accepted and implemented as is done in the US or UK.⁷

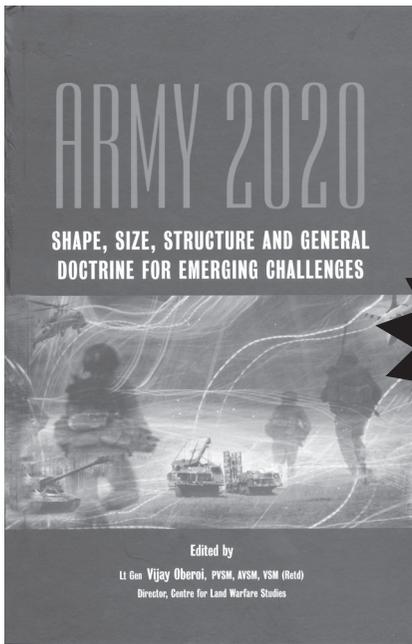
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Alternatively, if the government can muster enough political will, statutory provisions could be enacted in the Parliament to force the issue, otherwise, we would continue to pay the price for neglecting the defence of our realm. The costs of this neglect are becoming visible every day and India cannot really have pretensions of becoming a major power if we continue only pay lip-service to our defence and security capabilities.

Notes

1. The Ministry of Defence's first background note to SCD on Restructuring of the MoD. See Standing Committee on Defence (2008-2009) Report on "Status of Implementation of Unified Command for Armed Forces", February 2009, p. 14.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
3. Action Taken Report by the Government on Recommendations contained in the Twenty-Second Report of the Committee on "Review of Implementation Status of GoM's Report on Reforming the National Security System in Pursuance of KRC Report—A Special Reference to Management of Defence; December 2008, p. 33.

4. Review of Implementation Status of Group of Minister's Report on Reforming the National Security System in Pursuance to the Kargil Review Committee Report—A Special Reference to Management of Defence. Presented on July 27, 2007, p. 15.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
6. "First Ever Joint Doctrine Released," *The Hindu*, May 18, 2006. Also at <http://www.hindu.com/2006/05/18/stories/2006051818900900.htm>
7. K Subrahmanyam, in *Dainik Jagran*, February 3, 2008.



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