

Defence Reforms: Managing Threats and Challenges to National Security

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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. The key geo-strategic challenges in South Asia emanate from the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and on the Af-Pak border; the unresolved territorial disputes between India and China, and India and Pakistan; and, the almost unbridled march of radical extremism that is sweeping across the strategic landscape. The rising tide of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) and the growing spectre of urban terrorism have also contributed towards vitiating India's security environment.

In May 1998, India and Pakistan had crossed the nuclear Rubicon and declared themselves states armed with nuclear weapons. Though there has been little nuclear sabre-rattling, tensions are inherent in the possession of nuclear weapons by neighbours with a long history of conflict. While the probability of conventional conflict on the Indian subcontinent remains low, its possibility cannot be altogether ruled out. Hence, there is an inescapable requirement for defence planners to analyse future threats and challenges carefully and build the required military

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capacities to defeat these if push comes to shove. Yet, despite the prolonged exposure that the security establishment has had in dealing with multifarious challenges, India's national security continues to be poorly managed.

Defence planning in India has been marked by knee-jerk reactions to emerging situations and haphazard single-Service growth. The absence of a clearly enunciated national security strategy, poor civil-military relations, the failure to commit funds for modernisation on a long-term basis and sub-optimal inter-Service prioritisation have handicapped defence planning. With projected expenditure of US \$100 billion on military modernisation over the next 10 years, it is now being realised that force structures must be configured on a tri-Service, long-term basis to meet future threats and challenges.

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Early Efforts Towards Defence Reforms

The Sino-Indian conflict in 1962 had aroused a new defence consciousness in the country after years of neglect, and efforts to formalise defence planning began in 1964. Various organisational changes were tried out:

- Defence requirements were assessed on a five-year basis and the First Defence Plan (1964-69) was drawn up.
- A Planning Cell was established in 1965 in the Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- The Second Defence Plan (1969-74) was instituted on a 'roll-on' basis. After a year was completed, an additional year was tagged at the other end so that the armed forces would always have a revised and updated five-year plan. This method was found to be impractical.
- In 1974, an Apex Group under the Union Minister for Planning suggested that a steady long-term defence effort would be more cost-

effective and economical than fluctuating allocations on account of periodic economic and security crises.

Structures for Defence Planning: Most of the defence planning machinery and planning methodology was developed in the decade 1964-74:

- In order to integrate defence planning within the overall economic planning effort, defence and economic development plans were made co-terminus.
- The Committee for Defence Planning (CDP) was established under the Cabinet Secretary.
- The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) was constituted in the Cabinet Secretariat to provide external and internal threat assessments.
- Planning Units were also established in the Department of Defence Production and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- A Planning and Coordination Cell was created in the MoD to coordinate and compile various plans into a comprehensive 'Defence Plan' for Cabinet approval. However, generalist civilian bureaucrats in the MoD lacked the necessary expertise to arbitrate between the Services and only succeeded in appending together the different requirements of individual Services without any analysis.
- Perspective Planning Directorates were established in the Services Headquarters (HQ) in the late 1970s.
- In 1986, the Directorate General of Defence Planning Staff (DG DPS), comprising officers from the three Services, DRDO, MoD and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), was constituted to coordinate and harmonise defence planning under the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC).

Weaknesses: While efforts have been made to improve defence planning and suitable structural changes have been instituted within the MoD, implementation of the process continues to be tardy.

- **Guidance:** The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), chaired by the Prime Minister (PM), meets as often as necessary to review emerging situations with an adverse impact on national security so as to issue suitable policy directives. However, the National Security Council (NSC), also chaired by the PM, whose charter it is to evolve an integrated national security strategy and provide guidance for long-term defence planning, seldom meets.
- **Plans:** Five-Year Defence Plans are rarely accorded formal government approval. The Tenth Defence Plan (2002-07) and Eleventh Defence Plan (2007-12) were not approved at all and drifted along on an *ad hoc* basis.
- **Funding:** Annual defence budgets, in which funds are committed only for one year at a time despite Five-Year Defence Plans having been in vogue for several decades, add an element of uncertainty to the planning process. Unutilised funds continue to lapse at the end of the financial year.
- **Coordination:** The absence of an empowered Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) is a glaring anomaly. The COSC works on the basis of consensus and is unable to agree on inter-Service priorities for force structuring and modernisation as every Service wants a larger share of the pie. The Services HQ make their own assumptions of the likely military strategy for future wars and plan their force structures accordingly. Consequently, the Long-Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) is integrated merely in name and is actually only a compilation of single-Service plans.
- **Defence Acquisition:** Despite the much-trumpeted reform in the procurement process, the acquisition of new weapons and equipment by the armed forces is still mired in bureaucratic red tape.

- **Defence R&D:** There is a dichotomy between the time consuming quest for technological self-reliance and the desire of the Services to import arms and equipment based on immediate operational exigencies. The disconnect in the interface between Research and Development (R&D), production agencies and users remains unresolved. As a result, ‘make’ or ‘buy’ decisions are still contentious and DRDO projects continue to be delayed, with consequent cost overruns.

Recent Defence Reforms

The only time a serious security review was undertaken in the recent past was after the Kargil conflict of 1999 when the Kargil Review Committee headed by the doyen 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: Lt Gen K. K. Hazari (Retd), 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, “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 (CCS) 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 adviser to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) 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 the Defence Staff (CDS) – which still has not happened. Among others, the CCS approved implementation of the following key measures:

- The post of CDS, whose tasks include inter-Services prioritisation of defence plans and improvement in jointmanship among the three Services, was approved. (However, a CDS is yet to be appointed – ostensibly because political consensus has been hard to achieve and there are differences among the three Services on whether or not a CDS is necessary.)
- Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) was established with representation from all the Services.

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- A tri-Service Andaman and Nicobar Command and a Strategic Forces Command were established.
- The tri-Service Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) was established under the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) for strategic threat assessments.
- Speedy decision-making, enhanced transparency and accountability were sought to be brought into defence acquisitions. Approval of the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP 2002) was formally announced. The DPP has been amended

several times since then.

- As part of the DPP, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) and the Defence Technology Board, both headed by the Defence Minister, were constituted.
- Implementation of the decisions of the DAC was assigned to the Defence Procurement Board (DPB).
- The National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) was set up for gathering electronic and other technical intelligence.
- The CCS also issued a directive that each of India's land borders with different countries be managed by a single agency like the Border Security Force. The concept of "one border, one force" was adopted.
- The CCS nominated the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) as India's primary force for counter-insurgency operations. This experiment has not yet fully succeeded as the CRPF is taking inordinately long to settle down in its new role as a counter-insurgency force.

Decision-making is gradually becoming more streamlined. The new Defence Planning Guidelines have laid down three inter-linked stages in the planning process:

- The 15-Year LTIPP, to be drawn up by HQ IDS in consultation with the Services HQ and approved by the DAC.
- The Five-Year Defence Plans for the Services (current 12th Plan: 2012-17), including on 5-Year Services Capital Acquisition Plan (SCAP), to be drawn up by HQ IDS in consultation with the Services HQ and approved by the DAC.
- The Annual Acquisition Plan (AAP), to be drawn up by HQ IDS and to be approved by the DPB. Budgetary allocations for the ensuing financial year (ending March 31) are made on the basis of the AAP.

Naresh Chandra Task Force

Despite the new measures approved for implementation by the CCS on May 11, 2001, many lacunae 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 was led by Mr. Naresh Chandra, former Cabinet Secretary and Ambassador to the US and comprised 13 other members. The members included Mr. G Parthasarathy, former High Commissioner to Pakistan, Air Chief Mshl S. Krishnaswamy (Retd), Adm 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 of the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and Mr V K Duggal, former Union Home Secretary, among others. The task force was given six months to submit its report.

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The committee submitted its report on May 23, 2012. The report was circulated to various ministries and departments of the Government of India for their comments and suggestions. Simultaneously, the government had appointed another task force chaired by Mr. Ravindra Gupta, former Secretary in the government, to analyse the requirements of defence modernisation and self-reliance. This task force is also understood to have submitted its report, but the details are not yet known.

The report of the Naresh Chandra Committee on defence reforms in India focussed attention on the hollowness of the national security decision-making process and the urgent need for change. Over a period of one year, the Naresh Chandra Committee has had wide ranging consultations with various government bodies, but does not appear to have consulted strategic studies think-tanks and independent experts with specialised domain knowledge. Though the report of the Naresh Chandra Committee has not been made public, the recommendations purportedly made by the committee have been appearing in spurts in the press.

These recommendations are incremental rather than revolutionary. According to news reports, the committee has urged the government to ensure adequate military preparedness to deal with a militarily more assertive China. By far, the most salient recommendation of the committee is to appoint a permanent Chairman of the present COSC, that is, another four-star post in addition to the Army, Navy and Air Force Chiefs of Staff. This falls well short of the inescapable operational requirement of appointing a CDS and simultaneously creating integrated Theatre Commands for joint warfare in future conflicts. While a permanent

Chairman of the COSC will certainly be able to better coordinate the modernisation plans of the three Services and improve the management of tri-Service institutions than a rotating Chairman, he will have no role to play in integrating operational plans for joint warfare. The solution lies in the establishment of tri-Service integrated Theatre Commands with Commanders-in-Chief (Cs-in-C) who report to the CDS while the Chiefs of Staff of the three Services are primarily planners responsible for the recruiting, raising and equipping of new units, acquisition of weapons and equipment, specialised training and maintenance.

Other recommendations of the committee include the creation of three new tri-Service Commands to better manage future challenges and vulnerabilities: Special Operations Command, Aerospace Command and Cyber Command. The establishment of a Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs to deliberate on security issues having foreign policy implications, the setting up of an Advanced Projects Agency on the lines of the US Defence Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA) under the Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister to oversee defence Research and Development (R&D), the posting of additional armed forces officers to the MoD and the MEA and civilian Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers to the Services HQ for better integration and coordination, have also been recommended. The committee has recommended an increase in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in defence joint ventures from 26 per cent at present to 49 per cent. All of these recommendations are unexceptionable and, if implemented, will go a long way towards overcoming present shortcomings.

Managing National Security

A lot still 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

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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 the Prime Minister, who is the head of government, and must be placed on the table of the 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, a 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.

Priority Measures Necessary

- Formulate a comprehensive National Security Strategic (NSS), after undertaking a strategic defence review.
- The government must immediately appoint a CDS to head the defence planning function and provide single-point military advice to the Cabinet Committee on Security.
- Approve the 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 Gross Domestic Product (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 Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Information, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4I2SR), artillery modernisation, the acquisition of modern fighter aircraft and aircraft carriers and submarines must be hastened.
- Modernisation plans of the central paramilitary and police forces must also be given the attention 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.

The Eleventh Defence Plan (2007-12) was not formally approved by the government throughout its currency. The government has also not approved the LTIPP 2007-22 formulated by the Services HQ. Without

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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 (PLA) will become a qualitative gap as well in 10 to 15 years. This can be done only by making the dormant National Security Council (NSC) a proactive policy formulation body for long-term national security planning. (The 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 Gorskoy*) 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 2 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 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

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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 Paramilitary 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 CDS or a permanent Chairman of the COSC 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 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 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.

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 undertaking fasts to get justice for their legitimate demand of “one rank-one pension”. The 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 United Progressive Alliance’s (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. Also, rather unbelievably, India is still without a National War Memorial.

Conclusion

During the long history of post-independence conflicts with India’s neighbours and prolonged deployment for internal security, the Indian Army and its sister Services have held the nation together. Dark clouds can once again be seen on the horizon, but the efforts being made to weather the gathering storm are inadequate. The government must

immediately initiate steps to build the capacities that are necessary for defeating future threats and challenges. It must take the opposition parties into confidence as a bipartisan approach must be followed in dealing with major national security issues. In fact, there is a requirement to establish a permanent National Security Commission mandated by an Act of Parliament to oversee the development of military and non-military capacities for national security.

Unless a Chief of the Defence Staff is appointed to guide integrated operational planning, it will continue to be mostly single-Service oriented in its conceptual framework.

A fluid strategic environment, rapid advances in defence technology, the need for judicious allocation of scarce budgetary resources, long lead times required for creating futuristic forces and the requirement of synergising plans for defence and development make long-term defence planning a demanding exercise. The lack of a cohesive national security strategy and defence policy has resulted in inadequate political direction regarding politico-military objectives and military strategy. Consequently, defence planning in India had till recently been marked by *ad hoc* decision-making to tide over immediate national security challenges, and long-term planning was neglected. This is now being gradually corrected and new measures have been instituted to improve long-term planning.

It is now being increasingly realised that a Defence Plan must be prepared on the basis of a 15-year Perspective Plan. The first five years of the plan should be very firm (Definitive Plan), the second five years may be relatively less firm but should be clear in direction (Indicative Plan), and the last five years should be tentative (Vision Plan). A reasonably firm allocation of financial resources for the first five years and an indicative allocation for the subsequent period are prerequisites.

Perspective planning is gradually becoming tri-Service in approach. It is now undertaken in HQ IDS, where military, technical and R&D

experts take an integrated view of future threats and challenges based on a forecast of the future battlefield milieu, evaluation of strategic options and analysis of potential technological and industrial capabilities. Issues like intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, air defence, electronic warfare and amphibious operations, which are common to all the Services, are now getting adequate attention. However, unless a CDS is appointed to guide integrated operational planning, it will continue to be mostly single-Service oriented in its conceptual framework.

Systemic weaknesses and structural shortcomings in India's national security decision-making system have led to sub-optimal synergisation of the available combat resources, meagre as these are. The government must accord the highest priority to the implementation of the recommendations of the Naresh Chandra Committee so that the country's armed forces are well prepared to meet future threats and challenges and are in a position to contribute positively to security in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region along with India's strategic partners.

