# Need for Holistic Restructuring of the Indian Military

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## Introduction

In the over five decades since Independence, vast changes have occurred in the security environment within the country, in the region of immediate concern, and at the global level. The last two decades have been of special importance, on account of the ongoing Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), the end of the Cold War, the global war on terrorism and the globalisation of the economy.

The defence forces of India, at over 1.3 million strong, are perhaps the fourth largest in the world, in terms of numbers, as well as in terms of some items of capital equipment. Since Independence in 1947, they have been engaged in active operations on a sustained basis, with only short periods of peace. These challenges have helped them to earn a formidable reputation of a force that delivers, usually against heavy odds.

Although the defence forces of India are highly professional, are they structurally, technologically and organisationally sufficiently modern to meet the challenges of the 21st century? They are no doubt large in numbers, but do they also carry the necessary punch? Do they create the necessary synergy that flows from a high degree of jointness? Are they capable of meeting the future challenges, which the country is likely to confront in the next two decades or so? If not, what changes are needed to enhance their capabilities? Should this be achieved by incremental changes or by radical and fundamental reforms? These are a few questions that need to be answered.

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Conventional wisdom is that the fighting potential of the defence forces of India has decreased over the last two decades. There are many reasons for this, including a lack of vision and knowledge of security-related issues amongst the political leadership, as also the bureaucracy; decreasing budgetary allocations; antiquated procurement procedures; a costly research department, whose output has been much below expectations and which has prevented the entry of private enterprise in the defence sector; antipathy to change; narrow parochial interests; hesitancy to take risks at the senior leadership level and a status-quo mentality amongst the decision-makers.

The result is that while accretions have taken place in the number of persons in uniform, in the number of additional units and formations, and in the quality and quantity of armaments, the overall structure of the defence forces and the methods of doing business continue to be much the same as they were nearly six decades back.

No person with even some knowledge of "matters military" will have a second opinion about the overwhelming importance of joint endeavours in wars and conflicts of today and even more so those of tomorrow. Besides many other facets, the obvious one of synergy is indisputable. Before initiating a discussion on the kind of jointmanship that needs to prevail, it would be a good idea to know where the Indian military stands in this respect today.

Force structures are never evolved in a vacuum. Many factors need to be considered while carrying out structural changes. Some of these are fairly obvious, while others need considerable thought. Factors which affect the security aspects of the global and regional environment are of great importance and need to be taken into account. Threats and challenges are of course perennial considerations, but at times we tend to forget that national aspirations are crucial to force structuring, as are the desired capabilities the nation wants from its defence forces. The changing security environment is another factor that needs to be taken into account. A consideration of all these factors should logically point

towards the size and shape of defence forces the nation needs, as well as the manner in which a transformation is to be achieved. These are the major aspects I intend to cover in this paper. For obvious reasons, the analysis would be broad-based in nature, the details being left to the concerned ministries and departments, which are tasked for such ventures.

## Defence Forces of India

Let us briefly recapitulate the current defence forces fielded by India. The strength of the defence forces of India on the active list is approximately 1.3 million, with the army dominating with nearly 1.1 million personnel. The air force has a strength of 140,000 and the navy fields approximately 55,000 personnel. There is a Territorial Army component of approximately 40,000.[1]

The field force of the army comprises thirteen corps, three armoured divisions, four Reorganised Army plains Infantry Divisions (RAPID), eighteen infantry divisions and ten mountain divisions, a number of independent brigades, and requisite combat support and service support formations and units. The main combat and combat support units are sixty two armoured regiments and there are over three hundred and fifty infantry battalions and three hundred artillery regiments (including two Surface to Surface Missile (SSM) units). Amongst major armaments and equipment, there are nearly 4000 main battle tanks, 2000 armoured personnel carriers, 4300 artillery pieces and 200 light helicopters.[2] Unlike most modern armies, the Indian Army fields only reconnaissance helicopters in its aviation corps, with the air force still clinging to attack and medium lift helicopters, which should have been transferred to the army a long time back.

The organisational structure of the army is generally on traditional lines, heavily influenced as it has been by the erstwhile colonial British military. The Indian Army is competent in conducting both conventional as well as low intensity conflict (LIC) operations.

The navy has 26 principal surface combatants, including one aircraft carrier; 49 patrol and coastal combatants and 16 submarines. The naval aviation has 35 combat aircraft and 97 helicopters. There is also a coast guard with 52 patrol craft of various types.[3]

The air force fields approximately 680 combat aircraft, grouped in 32 fighter ground attack and six fighter squadrons; 40 armed helicopters grouped in three squadrons; 12 transport squadrons; 19 helicopter squadrons and miscellaneous squadrons covering tanker, maritime attack, electronic countermeasures, survey, VIP movement, training and so on.[4]

The growth of the defence forces of India in the past has usually been as a reaction to contemporary crises. Resultantly, the defence forces have generally remained unchanged, both structurally and in doctrinal terms, except for incremental changes to meet challenges as they arose. In recent years, however, there is a discernable doctrinal shift from attrition to manoeuvre warfare. Since the late 1980's, availability of funds has been a major constraint, with allocations for defence being less than 2.5 per cent of the GDP.

The three services are organised for conducting largely conventional operations, although a very large component of the army is heavily involved in Low Intensity Conflict operations. In all the three services, there has been some infusion of state-of-the-art equipment and armament, but much less than what is needed.

India is a responsible nuclear weapon state, with an unblemished record of non-proliferation, which cannot be easily matched by even nuclear weapon states of long standing. Our nuclear policy has two main components – minimum deterrence and no first use.

Our higher defence structure is perhaps the weakest part of the defence forces of India. The defence forces are not part of the government of India, but are an attached "office". The implications of this formulation are obvious and need not be amplified, except to highlight that this

arrangement effectively keeps them outside the policy formulation loop. No doubt, the service headquarters are consulted on security issues, but that is no substitute for being part of formulating policy. The highest policy formulation body in the country is the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). It gets its inputs from a variety of sources, viz. the National Security Council (NSC), the Cabinet Secretariat, different ministries, intelligence agencies and so on. The inputs from the services are channelled through the ministry of defence; neither the service chiefs nor the Chairman Chief's of Staff Committee are members of the CCS, although service chiefs may be called for consultations, like many others.

A National Security Council (NSC) was created in 1999. A National Security Advisor (NSA) was also appointed. We have had three incumbents so far for this appointment – two were retired diplomats and the third is a retired intelligence specialist. The NSA has a secretariat, which is headed by a Deputy NSA. This appointment too has been held by retired diplomats so far. As far as the secretariat is concerned, officers of various ranks hold senior, middle level and junior staff appointments, but the military is represented only by a handful of junior officers. An ironical state of affairs, indeed!

Within the Ministry of Defence, there is neither integration, nor any methodology for analysing issues jointly. The Ministry of Defence asks service headquarters individually or jointly to submit their views on issues, whether they are on operational, intelligence or administrative matters or relating to personnel, and thereafter the Ministry deliberates on them, despite having little or no competence to analyse such military matters.

A similar situation prevails within service headquarters, wherein the stance of a particular service on an issue is first finalised in-house, including by obtaining inputs from their respective commands. Thereafter, it is forwarded to the Chief of Staff Committee for consideration. The Committee comprises the three service chiefs, with the seniormost being

the Chairman. Such a structure and such formulations cannot hope to deliberate on issues objectively, as service biases are foremost in each member's mind.

Since last year, the service headquarters have started calling themselves as Integrated Headquarters. It is a meaningless exercise in semantics, as there is hardly any integration of the three services, let alone with the ministry of defence. Even the establishment of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) continues to remain unimplemented.

## Global and Regional Security Environment

The global security environment will continue to be influenced by the unilateralism of the sole super power, the USA; the growing potential of regional powers, particularly China; fundamentalism and terrorism; and the internal upheavals in many developing countries.

The 21st Century had opened with the global environment focused more on economic issues and multilateral and bilateral cooperation amongst nations. However, after the events of 11 September 2001 (9/11), security issues have re-emerged and taken centre-stage. In addition to terrorism, the world continues to be plagued with conventional military threats, as well as non-military threats. This state of affairs is likely to continue in the next two decades.

The South Asian region is historically a conflict prone region, comprising post-colonial states, which have certain endemic vulnerabilities. Some of these are:

- Legacy of colonialism, the bloody Partition of India in 1947 and the break up of Pakistan in 1971.
- Tendency to dishonour treaties demarcating boundaries settled during the British Empire, and the use of military force to realign borders.
- The intolerant attitude of the super powers during the Cold War towards those states that sought to pursue independent policies.

- Discord amongst ethnic, religious and linguistic groups, resulting in internal turbulence.
- Uncontrolled population explosion, leading to poverty, illiteracy, disease, environmental degradation and unplanned urbanisation. This is compounded by demographic shifts, both within nations and across borders.
- Arms and drug trafficking, and a growing nexus between crime and politics.

The security environment in South Asia continues to be influenced by historical disputes; nuclearisation; paucity of energy sources; inadequate harnessing of the abundant water resources; the growing potential of China; the war on terrorism; the spread of fundamentalism; and the social upheaval in practically all countries, due to the rising expectations of their people.[5] The scenario is further complicated by a rise in trans-border terrorism, sponsored ethnic strife, and low intensity conflicts.[6] The impact of the unilateralism of the sole super power, the USA, over events and policies in Asia, must also be factored in. All this is against the backdrop of vastly increased economic activity, globalisation and the great potential of the information revolution, which is making steady inroads into every facet of life.

India and Pakistan are the two nuclear states in South Asia, in addition to China, an earlier nuclear weapons power. The risk of a nuclear war in the region stands greatly reduced, but the proliferation of nuclear weapons and missiles is of grave concern, particularly when the countries involved are those which are prone to be influenced by terrorist activities, or have a history of promoting terrorists, either as state policy, or by ignoring the rise of religious fundamentalism in their countries, for various reasons. The revelations of major proliferation activities by Pakistan and North Korea are now history. Iran's ambitions in the nuclear field are a major cause for concern. The obvious conclusions are that the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) has not worked and perhaps an entirely new dispensation is needed to control the spread of nuclear weapons. As long as blatant acts of major proliferation, like those of Pakistan and North

Korea, are glossed over by the major powers, especially by the United States, on account of their short-term gains, many new aspirants will attempt to go nuclear.[7]

On the conventional plane, while limited conventional conflicts are still likely to occur, they are gradually giving way to conflicts at the lower end of the spectrum of conflict. However, the proliferation of conventional weaponry and the transfer of weapons and equipment by China to Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar, as also other countries on India's periphery, have adversely affected the South Asian regional military balance.

## Threats and Challenges

India's sphere of influence needs to encompass not just the South Asian Sub-continent, but also the northern Indian Ocean area, from the eastern seaboard of Africa in the west, to the Malacca Straits in the east, and must include Iran, Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics (CARs), China and Myanmar. India's credibility, as a regional power will be contingent upon institutional stability, economic development and military strength, including nuclear deterrence.

The long stretches of disputed borders with China and Pakistan and sizeable areas under their illegal occupation continue to be major irritants, notwithstanding the peace processes currently underway with both countries. These are unlikely to be resolved in the short term and will continue to generate tensions and instability at periodic intervals. Our vast island territories also need to be guarded.

Many of India's external challenges are related to its extensive land and sea frontiers. The land frontiers exceed 15,000 km, covering seven neighbouring countries. The border in the state of Jammu and Kashmir is perpetually volatile, except when a mutually agreed cease-fire is in force, as it is at present. Pakistan is in adverse possession of large areas of this Indian State. An on-going peace process between India and

Pakistan continues, and there are many positive fallouts of this process, but unless Pakistan stops the infiltration of insurgents and terrorists into Jammu & Kashmir, substantive improvement is unlikely.

India has a disputed border with China, too. China continues to be in adverse possession of 40,000 sq km of Indian Territory. A dialogue to resolve various issues between India and China is currently in progress, albeit at a slow pace. India-China relations have improved in recent years. A "Peace and Tranquillity" treaty is in place. The momentum towards confidence building and improved relations is continuing. There are no major disputes with India's other neighbours, but the borders are extensive and somewhat porous.

The long coastline (7683 km), the island territories off both coasts, and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of over two million square kilometres all add up to various types of challenges. For example, the island territories to the east, i.e. the Andaman and Nicobar group of islands, are 1300 kilometres from the Indian mainland, but only 150 kilometres from Indonesia, 500 odd kilometres from Malaysia and Thailand, 250 kilometres from Myanmar and 400 kilometres from Bangladesh.

The time has come for India to look outwards. There are many tasks and contingencies outside our frontiers. These include coming to the assistance of our neighbours; rescuing or assisting Indian nationals abroad; safeguarding our vital economic or other interests; rendering aid during natural or other calamities; forming part of a multi-national force; and so on. For these challenges, we do need to have a state-of-the-art tri-service trans-national capability. This does not mean we have designs on other countries or that we are now becoming hegemons.

The escalating world oil prices have enhanced our energy crisis. Currently, India is the world's sixth largest energy consumer and in 2010 we will hit the fourth place. We have made heavy investments abroad in the oil sector. These include long term contracts for oil and gas supply, on-going negotiations for participation in pipeline projects, as well as energy

projects involving exploration, development, transportation and refining of hydrocarbons to meet our future needs. These investments, in locations as far afield as the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia, need to be safeguarded against any unforeseen eventualities.

The next security challenge is the state of our neighbours. The political and economic status of most of our neighbours is a cause of major concern, as any major upheavals will pose great security and economic challenges for us. In addition, the governing elite in these countries tend to blame India for all their ills. It is no doubt a political ploy that works domestically. We need to take initiatives at many levels, including at the military level, to allay their imagined and real fears, so that our relations with our neighbours can be brought to an even keel.

As far as the maritime dimension is concerned, the littorals of the Indian Ocean and the island nations are both important. We cannot have any hostile or inimical powers threatening them. These countries need to be given assistance in terms of military hardware, training or technical assistance and sometimes assistance in policing their waters or airspace.

The on-going and future threats from terrorism, insurgencies and resorts to mindless violence to meet political ends are other major challenges. These may well be the most important and biggest security challenges of the future.

We are a responsible nuclear weapon state, which entails the efficient management of this deterrent capability. For deterrence to be successful, the adversary must be convinced of the severity of our retaliation. In addition, we must ensure that our second strike capability is not only well protected, but that it is also overwhelmingly devastating.

The last challenge is to transform the defence forces into a lean, technology intensive, networked and joint entity. It sounds simple, but considering our historical baggage and a penchant for the status quo, it would be

a difficult proposition. We also need to function in a holistic manner, where security, foreign and economic policies must be integrated. At present, we are unfortunately functioning in separate compartments.

## National Aspirations and Desired Capabilities

India's primary strategic priority and goal remains the rapid socio-economic development of its people. Our national objectives may be summarised as under:

- Develop as a fully secular, multi-cultural state, in which freedom of speech, thought and equal opportunity are available to all, regardless of race, religion, caste, community or sex.
- Ensure a secure and stable environment conducive to unhindered economic growth.
- Preserve and ensure the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of India.
- Contribute our share in international affairs, consistent with our policies.

To attain the above objectives, India needs to ensure a secure external and internal security environment. The defence forces of India, as the ultimate instrument of the state, are responsible for safeguarding the core values and national interests from external aggression and internal subversion.

Our objectives also need to have an ideological component and reflect the inner urges of the people. Keeping all these aspects in mind, our national policy could be stated as: "To establish a strong, economically vibrant and united democratic India, free from internal and external threats, enjoying a prominent status in the region and having its rightful and honoured place in the world."

India aspires to be recognised as an economic and military power of some reckoning, with a permanent membership of the UN Security Council. To achieve these objectives, India needs to ensure a peaceful internal

environment, security from external threats and capability to project power in the greater South Asian region. Such an aspiration requires India to modernise its defence forces and equip them with contemporary techno-equipment to meet the expanded roles they would need to perform, while ensuring sustained economic growth and development.

## Environmental Changes Affecting Military Operations

Globalisation has had a profound effect in making the world smaller and more accessible, but it has also had a major effect on the security environment. While military force factors continue to retain their significance in international relations, economic, political, technological, ecological, information and energy factors are also playing an increasingly dominant role in the shaping of the security environment.[8]

The regional military environment in South Asia is affected by on-going conflicts; proliferation and transfer of weapons; advancements in military technology; and the changing nature of war. These are elaborated in succeeding paragraphs.

Conflicts have continued in varying intensities in South Asia. Most of these conflicts have a historical baggage, with solutions so intractable that they linger despite many changes in the regional and national environments. Like volcanoes, they erupt once in a while and then lie dormant, but festering within, till another catalyst causes yet another eruption.[9]

The notable conflicts in South Asia are the India-Pakistan adversarial relationship; the India-China border stand-off; and internal conflicts generated by a section of the people, like the LTTE problem in Sri Lanka, the Maoists' continuing struggle for power in Nepal, insurgencies and rebellions in Pakistan and a number of insurgencies in India.

In the last two decades, China's export of high-grade steel, navigational guidance systems and missile technologies to Pakistan had enabled it to

arm itself with nuclear weapons, with matching delivery capabilities. In turn, Pakistan used this clandestinely acquired capability to proliferate it to North Korea in return for missiles and missile technology, in some kind of a barter deal.

A similar situation obtains in the conventional arena. The accelerating recourse to conventional weapons proliferation in recent years has enabled many countries to possess high technology weapons at low costs. This has serious implications for regional security. Besides Pakistan, China has also provided conventional weaponry to Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Nepal, to name only a few countries. These actions have tended to alter the regional military balance.

Rapid advancements in technology, in the fields of information, nuclear energy, biotechnology, aviation, space and underwater operations, are changing the concept of warfare. Capabilities for all weather surveillance, night vision devices, and extensive use of satellites and multiplicity of sensors have also affected all types of operations. In the field of information technology (IT), digitisation, networked communications, electronic warfare, as well as information warfare (IW), have highlighted the importance of systems integration. This has led to the concept of system of systems, which is a complete architecture of detection, selection, display, targeting and attack.[10]

RMA, which is manifested by high technology weapons, sensors, communications and information technology, will increasingly have an impact on all types of military operations. Warfare in the information age, irrespective of whether it is nuclear, conventional or low intensity in nature, will require highly complex planning and coordination, near real time and total situational awareness, decision support systems and massive data-base and information-exchange capabilities to tackle both friendly and inimical situations. Technology has made information more readily available, and it has now become a weapon of choice. The armed forces of India need to focus on IT and Information Warfare (IW) in a big way in the coming years and decades.

The continuing wave of technological change is different, in two ways, from even the IT revolution of the 1990s. First, it is a vastly more profound transformation, due to the synergy of three emerging technologies, viz. bioengineering, nano-engineering, and robotics and artificial intelligence. Secondly, it is a revolution that will occur at a speed never seen before. Observations of change over the past century indicate that technology is evolving exponentially, which means change is accelerating or the rate of change is increasing.[11]

The proliferation of all types of missiles; the versatility of modern aviation platforms; the precision guided and terminally guided munitions (PGMs and TGMs); and multi-dimensional manoeuvre vehicles are some of the breakthrough technologies which have changed the nature of warfare.

Missile Defence (MD), whether national missile defence (NMD) or theatre missile defence (TMD), is another technological advancement which will have a major effect on warfare in future. At present, in this region, only India in South Asia and China further afield, are examining it with some seriousness. MD is a strategic shift of major importance – from a doctrine of deterrence to that of interdictory interception. MD is already vehemently opposed by China, whose response may well be a further up-gradation of its strategic nuclear forces. This is likely to have a ripple effect in many parts of the world, including in South Asia, particularly India.[12]

The proliferation of Nuclear Biological Chemical (NBC) weapons, smart weapons, imaginative employment of IT, more lethal and precise weapons, the fielding of many types of missiles and major up-gradation of aviation assets, all have made substantive changes to the concepts and methodologies of waging war. Asymmetric Warfare, for example, focuses on fighting a stronger enemy and still winning. In the same context, non-nuclear deterrence, which is aimed at deterring regional conflicts with only conventional weapons, continues to be important.

Operations in the future may not be easily divided into conventional and low intensity conflicts.[13] The modern battlefield will be characterised

by short, intense operations, against a nuclear backdrop. There will be a large number of short, swift, and lethal engagements, using precision weapons, with heavy attrition, but with minimum collateral damage. Wars will be fought in all six dimensions – space, cyber, air, land, sea and sub-surface. Increased use of various types of sensors will bring total transparency to the battlefield. This will affect the achievement of surprise, both strategic and tactical, and there would be an overload of information at the command posts.

In conventional operations, front, depth and rear areas would be engaged simultaneously with real time surveillance, integrated Command Control Communication Computers Intelligence Interoperability (C4 I2 ), target acquisition and highly lethal precision weapons systems. The battlefield will become more digitised, more transparent and would experience a major increase in deployment of electronic devices, signalling the growing primacy of the electromagnetic spectrum.[14] Escalation will have to be carefully controlled to ensure that no nuclear red lines are crossed. Despite this constraint, sufficient space for conventional operations will continue to be available. The ability of ground forces will depend upon the speed with which they can move, concentrate and regroup rapidly over any type of terrain.

Today, joint and combined operations are the norm. IT, in all its manifestations, affects decision-making. At the same time, IW, including the creation of a favourable public opinion, is a necessary adjunct to the higher direction of war. Military planners will need to give considerable thought to the likelihood of terrorist threats, along with fighting conventional operations. Resultantly, greater number of troops and equipment would be required to cope with such threats.[15]

## Future Role: Defence Forces of India

In the coming decades, the role of the defence forces will continue to be "to preserve national interests and safeguard territorial integrity and unity of the country, against any external or internal threats, by deterrence or by waging a war".

The defence forces have to deal with both traditional missions of deterrence and war fighting, as well as non-traditional missions. They also play an important role in nation building. The missions of the defence forces can be listed as under:

- Deterring hostile neighbours possessing NBC weapons and missiles.
- Sub-national threats from hostile neighbours, including proxy war and terrorism.
- Operating under the aegis of the UN, other groupings, or even independently, in roles like peacekeeping, peacemaking, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, or national reconstruction.
- Tackling overseas crises that threaten Indian citizens, property and interests.
- Domestic emergencies that exceed the capacity of other agencies like state governments, police forces or central agencies.

Excessive involvement of the defence forces, particularly the army, in internal security duties adversely affects their combat potential. Continued deployment on such duties also tends to alienate the populace and tarnishes the image of the defence forces. These are difficult operations, as their resolution essentially lies in the political domain and the army has to operate under a number of constraints. Therefore, over-exposure in internal security duties is counter-productive, especially when their employment on such duties is for a prolonged period.

Although there has been an exponential growth of many types of police forces in our country, they are currently incapable, or unwilling, or both, to tackle insurgencies. Consequently, I foresee that the defence forces, primarily the Army, will continue to be called out to tackle insurgencies, terrorism, proxy wars and even high-grade internal security situations.

India's military strategy has to be effective across the entire spectrum of possible conflicts. Increased focus on information technology and information warfare is also essential. The army particularly needs to

transit from manpower orientation to high technology, tempering it with the knowledge that sub-conventional operations are manpower intensive.

India's aspirations for peace and security require the modernisation of the defence forces, restructuring them and equipping them with contemporary technological equipment. The restructuring should be such that the military continues to remain professionally strong. Restructuring includes optimisation of doctrine and concepts, restructuring of the field force, efficient management of internal conflicts, upgrading human resources, streamlining logistics and modernising the training methodology of the military.

At the upper end of the conflict spectrum, only nuclear weapons deter nuclear weapons. However, at the conventional level, the need is to build a capability for small-size operations, which are executed swiftly. At the sub-conventional level, the approach should be multi-faceted, with the military part being pro-active. Special Forces would play an extremely important role in such operations.

In the coming decades of the 21st Century, our defence forces need to address the following:

- The growing number of non-traditional threats will continue to increase, and I fear that the nation will continue to rely on the defence forces as the principal instrument to deal with them.
- The defence forces, as presently structured, may not be able to meet all the potential challenges ahead, which could span the entire spectrum of conflict.
- For meeting the challenges of the new century and adapt to the rapid development of new technologies, the defence forces have to change radically and become increasingly unified.
- The enormous human potential in the Army, its judicious harnessing, moulding it to exacting standards, providing it with special skills and injecting a high level of motivation, are also essential. Combat power is not simply the sum of machine

performance. Machines can assist, but warfare will continue to be an intensely human activity.

- There is a definite need for better decision-making and the integration of all instruments of power (political, economic, military and informational) to tackle the multidimensional challenges ahead.

## Jointmanship

Modern War cannot be fought with outdated structures, wherein the army, the navy and the air force conduct operations independently, with coordination only being achieved with organisations as old as nearly seven-eight decades back. War is a joint endeavour, wherein the entire nation has to gear up for fighting it. Today, this truism is even more relevant, because waging war today is a complex phenomenon. This complexity is likely to increase in the future. The reasons include high technology, the nature of modern war, new threats and challenges and the reality of nuclear weapons in the arsenal of our potential adversaries. Consequently, a joint force, which acts in an integrated manner, is not just desirable but an imperative. Gone are the days when individual services, like the army or navy, fought wars on their own.

Most professional militaries have adopted jointmanship, not merely in their organisations and structures, but in their very approach to tackling military problems, big or small. Unfortunately, the Indian military is an exception amongst the more professional militaries. While everyone who matters endorses the need for joint endeavours, it eventually turns out to be merely lip service. This must change, for if we continue in this mode, we will be unable to generate the necessary synergy, so essential for winning conflicts, battles and wars.

The Indian military had realised the importance of jointmanship soon after our Independence. This vision was translated into reality by the setting up of joint institutions like the National Defence Academy (NDA), the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) and the National

Defence College (NDC). These institutions, all joint, covered a wide canvas, from pre-commissioning training to the highest level of formal training an officer undergoes. Unfortunately, somewhere along the way, we lost our focus and drifted into separate entities, which became institutionalised over time.

The wars we fought since our Independence added to this "lone ranger" syndrome. Our first war, in Jammu & Kashmir in 1947-48, was essentially an army affair, with some support from the air force. The navy was not involved. In 1962, when China attacked us, the army again operated alone, as it was decided not to employ the air force. Once again there was no role for the navy. The next war, against Pakistan in 1965, saw all the three services fighting the enemy, but mostly independently, although the army and the air force did carry out coordination in specific operations.

It was only in the 1971 war that the three services were employed synergistically and won the war decisively. Synergy during this war was achieved largely because of the personalities of the dramatis personae and the nearly nine month long planning and preparation time available and not because of any structural or organisational changes. Unfortunately, the example of the 1971 war continues to be quoted by those opposed to greater jointmanship, on the specious plea that since the structures worked during 1971, there was no need for instituting reforms now! This is of course absurd logic, considering that nearly four decades have passed since then. The entire nature of war has changed now and there is no surety that the personal chemistry of the new actors would again work positively.

Besides the above mentioned conflicts, the army has also been involved, almost continuously, in fighting different types of insurgencies and terrorism in various parts of the country. The nature of these operations does not need the navy and the air force to step in. So essentially, it is again the army operating on its own. This had its repercussions during the Kargil conflict in 1999, when initially the air force refused to participate,

on the plea that it would escalate the conflict. When they did come in later, it took time to build up the necessary synergy. It is apparent that our experiences post-Independence lulled us into a state of complacency and we made little effort to forge joint concepts, structures and institutions, thus obtaining less than optimal results.

A major recommendation of the Kargil Review Committee set up after the Kargil conflict to recommend reforms, including in the higher defence structure, was the need to set up joint structures at the earliest. The GoM eventually accepted the recommendations, after some changes and implementation instructions were issued in mid-2001. While an integrated defence headquarters and two joint commands have been formed, a key recommendation, i.e. the establishment of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), remains unimplemented. Resultantly, the integrated headquarters gets its directions from the ineffective Chiefs of Staff Committee, an organisation which has neither the teeth nor the inclination to take any strong and meaningful decisions, including in the realm of jointmanship. Unfortunately, this state of affairs suits the principal actors, viz. the political leadership which continues to be bugged by the non-existent spectre of a military takeover, however preposterous it may sound; the bureaucracy, who see the CDS as threatening their overlordship over of the service headquarters; and even the service headquarters, who are highly reluctant to part with any power which will dilute their fiefdoms.

The service headquarters may not want to dilute any of their powers, but at least two out of three used to speak in favour of jointness. Now, nearly six years after the GoM had given their directions, even that has changed. Apparently, none of them are now interested in the appointment of a CDS. There is no discernable change in the stance of the political leadership as well as the bureaucracy. So we flounder along, believing in our fatalistic fashion that everything will turn out right in the end and through some sleight of hand the Indian military will, for the umpteenth time, again pull the chestnuts out of the fire, as it always has when the chips are down! The moot question is, should policies of such great

importance, relating to the security and indeed the very existence of our nation, continue to be sacrificed at the altar of expediency or sloth or indifference, or all three?

## Transformation

There is a need to transform our military in a deliberate manner. The transformation must be major in scope. This can only be done if sufficient resources are made available. For this, the armed forces have to convince the political leadership, as well as the people, of the legitimacy of their needs. Defence allocations continue to be meagre, at less than 2.5 per cent of the GDP. Our decision-making systems and processes are also slow. These need to change.

The transformation should begin with the development of a realistic strategic direction. The national strategy must clearly spell out interests, goals, priorities, and resource allocations. From this, a national military strategy should be evolved. This, in turn, will enable the military to decide on the details of restructuring, hopefully without the influences of service bias or sentimentality. Some assets will have to be phased out over time, as new, innovative systems come on line through the process of transformation.

The process of change must be extensive and should also include a review of our personnel system. We need to produce junior leaders with broader and more sophisticated educational and service experience. Quality-of-life areas, compensation, benefits, personal development, challenging experiences, and personnel stability have to be major considerations in getting and keeping the best and brightest our society has to offer. The future military will be an even more complex institution and will require truly competent and dedicated members.

We must seriously address joint warfare. The Services must eliminate the inter-service bickering that continues to be the bane of the defence forces. At the apex level, our structures for the management of higher defence and

the systems for providing military advice, as well as recommendations for national security policy, also need to be re-examined. The CDS must be appointed without any delay and additional joint commands must be set up. While the eventual structures we should aim at must be integrated commands, this should come about in an evolutionary manner. The appointing of a CDS and gradual addition of new joint commands will, over a period of time, suggest the numbers and types of joint commands we need. For the next few years, we may leave operational commands as they are at present, except that the jointness amongst them must be substantially increased. There are other areas like Special Forces, Space, Training, Communications, Logistics and so on, which lend themselves for restructuring into joint commands

Within the army, having two sets of forces, a small-sized traditional army for deterrence and waging war and a much larger, lightly equipped internal security force (ISF) for combating low intensity conflicts is perhaps one answer for restructuring. In the Navy, while the enhancing of blue water capability must continue, some focus will have to shift to counter terrorism and militancy at sea, including greater control of coastal waters and our EEZ. Till now, the role of the Air Force in counter-terrorist and counter-insurgency operations has been confined to air transportation. This would need to change. Future low intensity threats would require the fielding of air power. Whether this takes the form of restructuring a part of the air force or enhancing army aviation assets so that they can take on these roles, can be debated, but the latter has obvious operational advantages. Major reforms and restructuring would be required for this, which would be opposed by large numbers, both within and outside the services.

In sum, the force structure of the defence forces of India should be such that it is able to achieve the objectives the nation expects from it. We need to be regional players of eminence, as well as have a say in global strategic formulations. The capabilities of the armed forces, therefore, must include the following:

- *Nuclear:* We need to refine our nuclear doctrine, which should

continue to be primarily for deterrence, but for use in case we are forced to use the nuclear option. Our retaliatory capability must be potent, comprehensive and timely. This entails, besides a range of warheads, the requisite delivery and support systems. We need to build up our current missile capability substantially, so that the army is equipped with a full range of missiles, capable of reaching all possible targets. It is important for India to continue to work towards a triad capability in the nuclear field. The military interface needs to be enhanced as it is currently less than desirable.

- *Conventional:* Credible conventional deterrence will continue to be important. The conventional capability of the defence forces must be comprehensive against our likely adversaries. The armed forces must maintain an effective superiority in conventional forces vis-à-vis Pakistan. They must also have the capability for punitive response to provocations short of war. The challenge China is expected to pose in the mid and long terms requires that our deterrence capability be upgraded, by adding a potent offensive capability to our current posture. In the maritime arena, we should have the capability to effectively guard our sea lanes of communications in the northern Indian Ocean region and protect our interests in the nation's EEZ. The air force must be capable of creating a favourable air situation at least in specified corridors, which have a direct linkage to offensive operations of the ground forces. The air force must also create additional strategic lift capability for tasks within the country's area of interest.
- *Low Intensity Conflict (LIC):* The LIC commitments of the defence forces, particularly the army, are likely to increase in the coming years, as there has been no improvement in the capabilities of the central police forces in tackling insurgency and terrorism, despite their increasing numerical strengths. The defence forces must be capable of fighting both internal insurgencies as well as those launched or supported by other countries or foreign entities. However, its conventional capability must not get diluted on account of excessive employment on counter-insurgency and

counter-terrorism roles. The army, particularly, must have adequate capability to fight high-grade insurgency in any part of India, including in our border states, as it is currently doing in Jammu and Kashmir. As both state and non-state actors are likely to resort to low intensity conflicts as their preferred mode of waging war, major restructuring may be required amongst the armed forces to meet this challenge. This may well imply a separate force, which must be equipped, manned and trained specifically for this role.

- *Peacekeeping:* The defence forces will have to play an enhanced role in peacekeeping operations, mostly under the aegis of the United Nations, but perhaps under other circumstances, too.
- *Joint Endeavours:* In all the above types of roles and operations, there would need to be a high level of jointness, otherwise the defence forces will not be able to achieve synergy and consequently the best results.

## Conclusion

Today, the defence forces of India are at the crossroads of a revolutionary change, marked by nuclearisation of the subcontinent, asymmetric threats like the on-going proxy war in Kashmir, our rapidly increasing interests within the region, military aspects of globalisation and rapid technological changes. In this new milieu, the defence forces must not only retain a combat edge in conventional operations, but also handle sub-conventional challenges effectively.

Focus on LIC operations must not distract the defence forces from other roles. We need to look at the totality of roles, which the military would need to perform. Deterrence is an essential element in all the roles of the military, whether they are in the conventional, non-conventional or sub-conventional arenas.

Change is no doubt difficult, as we are highly conservative. The bureaucracy, both civil and military, and the political leadership

with vested interests in preserving the status quo, will resist change or will support only marginal changes. This will further complicate implementation of the needed reforms.

India is now genuinely poised to shine. It cannot do so with a feeble military machine, which functions on ad hoc basis or on the glorious past. We need to revamp and restructure before we are actually faced with the challenges we have talked about. The need today is for a synergistic and visionary national approach for the strong, purposeful and modern India that is just over the horizon. idsa

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**Notes**

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