

Establish NSC & Restructure MOD

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The issues of national security and higher control of defence have been discussed in this journal and elsewhere fairly often in the last decade or so without any impact on the organisational structures or the methods of working. However, both are matters of such consequence that the propagation of reforms necessary must be persisted particularly as we now have a Prime Minister who is addressing problems systematically and a Defence Minister who is seen to be taking interest in his portfolio. Earlier, Mr Arun Singh had shown similar rather rare trait as generally the demands of political activity claim precedence. Unfortunately, Mr Arun Singh's tenure was a short one.

In a review of Monty Palit's recently released book, "War in High Himalayas", S. Gopal observes, "He shows that the system of government and the institutional framework for the making of policy had inherent weaknesses which at times of crises caused confusion and invited disaster." So much for national security infrastructure and mechanism. On the count of higher control of defence, the observation is equally telling. "There was a gap which was never sought to be bridged between the civil and military sides of the administration". On both counts, no advance has been made in the 30 intervening years and more.

NATIONAL SECURITY

The rationale for the national security infrastructure is easily explained. Basically, any issue effecting national security, be it economic, an internal problem or an external threat, to name only some, needs a holistic consideration. Even if it is to be referred to the Cabinet for a decision, an input from one ministry, Finance, Home or Defence, does not ensure this. What often happens is even worse; the known views of a minister or the PM colour the analysis of the ministry concerned. In any case, a ministry loaded with the day to day problems and managing normal administrative matters is not the best apparatus to analyse national security issues.

To keep global as well as regional developments under review, to look into the future to forecast, formulate and analyse issues having a bearing on national security as also to look into questions of national security that may be referred to by various departments of the government, there is requirement of national security staff composed of personnel from varied disciplines

and walks of life; academics, analysts, diplomats, bureaucrats, the military and others. This multi-dimensional national security staff (NSS) would serve as the "think tank" of the National Security Council (NSC) which would, in effect be a Committee of the Cabinet with designated ministers and special invitees; Ministers of External Affairs, Defence, Home and Finance being the permanent members and others being invited depending on the issue being discussed. The Chief of Defence Staff/Chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Staff, Scientific Advisor to the Minister of Defence and other officials would also be invited in accordance with the same criteria. The Prime Minister would head the Committee.

It would be necessary for the NSC to have a high powered secretary of the rank not lower than the Cabinet Secretary, but preferably of a Minister of State. However, the Secretary, should be from a Service (Civil or Military) and not a politician. He would coordinate the work of the NSS and ensure that its results receive the attention of the NSC. The latter requires easy access to the PM who would, to be sure, also throw issues at the NSS for analysis as indeed any member of the NSC may. Secretary NSC would have the normal secretarial functions of arranging meetings, issuing directions based on the decisions of the NSC and obtaining progress reports from the ministries concerned for the information of the NSC.

Some ill informed criticism of the NSC suggests that the NSC would be an extra-constitutional body. The fallacy of this observation is too apparent to need a detailed comment. As stated earlier the NSC would be a committee of the Cabinet which is formed as provided for in the constitution. The other observation that an NSC structure would involve duplication is also not valid. Issues effecting national security may nominally be the concern of a particular ministry but their holistic, comprehensive and detailed analysis requires consideration by a separate body so that factors having a bearing on all aspects of the polity are given due weightage.

Early in 1990, the National Front government announced the formation of the NSC but the institution did not become functional and just as well; the structure proposed was not workable. For one thing, it did not provide for NSS and gave some similar role to the JIC (Joint Intelligence Committee). Without a whole time NSS that is not bogged down with routine but acts as a "think tank," the NSC would not get the required inputs and national security issues are not likely to be even taken cognisance of in time.

Lack of coordination of intelligence agencies stands out for all to see. Various intelligence organisations cultivate their bosses and become a law into themselves. They often work at cross purposes and seldom risk forecasts.

The JIC should be given the task of coordinating their activities. It should also provide important inputs to the NSC in the way of intelligence assessments and forecasts. It cannot obviate the NSS.

At present there is no institutional arrangement and our response is knee jerk and ad hoc. National security issues are taken cognisance of too late and measures to meet the problem are considered on the basis of personal equations a la NEFA 1962 where the equation was BG Kaul, BM Mullick and the Prime Minister. The Defence Committee of the Cabinet is defunct. In any case that Committee was primarily for the higher control of defence. What we are talking about here is national security in totality. This process has to be institutionalised with the NSS, the "think tank," as an essential part of it.

HIGHER CONTROL OF DEFENCE

There are two major aspects of higher control of defence that need attention. The first relates to management and the second to coordination. To take the management aspect first, the present system is not conducive to timely or correct decision making due primarily to the existing system of financial control as also the organisation and role of the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

The Financial Advisor (FA) is an official of the Ministry of Finance. So, apart from financial control in the way of budget allocation, the expenditure of the funds allotted is also controlled by Finance Ministry through the FA. It is the job of this Ministry to manage the finances of the nation both in the way of revenue and expenditure. Financial advice should also be available to various ministries of the government but as an integrated part of these. In this case, the FA should function as an officer of the MOD to terminate the control by the ministry of finance after funds have been allotted.

MANAGEMENT OF DEFENCE

Integrated finance would help in making timely decisions. At present all matters are considered by three channels, one after the other; first by the Service HQs, and then by the FA to whom the MOD refer the case and finally by the MOD. Apart from the fact that this process is time consuming, this consideration in isolation by the three elements does not draw on collective expertise of the military, the bureaucrat and finance. An integrated MOD, with the Service HQs and Finance as part of it, would lead to an analysis of the proposal only once by the military, finance and bureaucracy at various levels. Thus, in addition to integrating finance, Service HQs; Army,

Navy & Air Force HQs, need to be made part of the MOD. In other words the MOD should be an integrated set up with finance and Service HQs merged in it.

In the present set up the MOD functions as higher HQs of the armed forces as it were. Manned as it is by generalist IAS officers who serve in the MOD for a tenure or two. It has no expertise to perform this role. Nor indeed is there a requirement of such a role as it only causes delay besides creating a bloated organisation in which there is, more or less, a deputy secretary for every director in Army/Navy/Air HQs. Thus we have a situation where the views of the DGMT, who has put in 30 years or more service including command of a division, on duration, scope and number of courses to be run at a training establishment, being questioned by a deputy or joint secretary having experience of 10 to 15 years in district administration and civil secretariat and thus considering the issue on the basis of common sense rather than any specialist knowledge of the subject. An integrated MOD would do away with this situation; the DGMT would be part of the MOD and the financial aspect would be gone into with integrated finance before the proposal comes to the DGMT.

There is also a case that the bureaucratic element of the MOD should be found from other services also such as the IFS and the armed forces apart from the IAS. While this proposal needs analysis, one step that needs to be taken immediately is that bureaucrats deputed to the ministry should specialise and their subsequent tenures at the Secretariat should be with the same ministry.

Serious rethinking is called for in regard to the role of the MOD. More and more of the management of defence needs to be left to Service HQs with their integrated finance. The MOD should restrict its role to national security issues, interaction with external affairs, coordination of the work of various intelligence agencies under the JIC, R & D as well as defence production and procurement of weapons. This is just a random list but the subjects mentioned are important aspects of defence management and constitute a full enough a plate. The size of the MOD can accordingly be cut down.

The best way of bridging the gap between the civil and military side of the administration mentioned in the initial paragraphs of this paper is to restructure the MOD as suggested above. This institutionalised integration would bridge the gap in as far as implementation of policy (management) is concerned. To achieve this at the strategic policy making level the answer, as suggested above, is to establish and ensure proper functioning of the NSC.

COORDINATION

The level of coordination achieved by the three services in matters of defence, both operational and administrative, depends entirely on the personalities of the three chiefs. The institutional arrangement in the way of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) with the longest serving chief as its chairman is non-effective. In the field of operational planning, the Services make their plans individually. There used to be, and perhaps it still exists, the Joint Planning Committee (JPC) under the COSC with a joint planning staff of three officers of grade I level, one each from the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. It served the purpose of keeping the services informed. There was little scope for joint planning except for some minor tasks.

A few years ago, a high level joint planning staff was established with a Lt General at the head. This staff could serve the purpose of joint planning within the proper structure of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). The aversion to the institution of CDS is very difficult to understand as the misgivings, of the politicians as well as of the Services are easily explained.

The understandable apprehension of the political bosses is that the post of the CDS would carry too much power. Being strong, he may use this power in an unconstitutional manner. Firstly, the CDS will not be in command of any forces and will wield no direct power over troops, units or formations. Secondly, in a democracy, like India, where changes in government can and have been brought about by constitutional means in the way of elections, a coup is unlikely particularly as each constituent's power is defined and each has functioned within these bounds. The armed forces are content in performing the important role of the defence of the realm. Thirdly, in circumstances which vary from polity to polity, when a coup does take place, it is the angry colonels, in command of forces, who bring it about. Therefore, on reflection it should be clear that the understandable apprehension is, in fact misplaced.

The services themselves have not exactly supported the CDS idea primarily by virtue of the misunderstanding that the post would be monopolised by the Army. The Army has indeed created such an impression by some senior generals observing that, in our context, the land battle is of the essence and that the primary task of the Air Force is to provide air support to the land forces. (Even if the first half of this statement is true at present, one should bear the likely future developments in mind. The Gulf War was an air and missile war with ground forces performing a mopping-up role). It is also, sometimes asserted that the Army is the predominant service in our armed forces and should provide the CDS. Since the implementation of the prin-

ciple of appointing the best man for the job would create its own problems, the best course, and indeed the one accepted by all advocates of the CDS system, is to fill the appointment by rotation. This is what is done by most countries and the adoption of this course should allay the fears of the Navy and the Air Force.

This process of coordination by structuring the CDS system should be accompanied by creating unified theatre commands; Western and North Eastern with theatre commanders from the Army, Peninsular & Southern Command with a CinC from the Navy and two under CsinC from the Air force - Air Defence and Strategic Air Command.

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Military hierarchy no less than the bureaucratic one resists change for many reasons, vested interest being the predominant one. It is human for a service chief or the defence secretary to think of the effect of changes suggested from the point of view of its effect on the post they occupy. One hopes that the individuals who occupy these and similar posts are big enough to brush aside such subjective considerations.

Is it too much to expect that the PM and the Defence Minister will find the time to put these problems on their priority list so that they get attended to? The consideration of setting up the NSC as also the restructuring of the MOD, establishing the CDS and theatre command systems, cannot be kept pending for too long.

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