

Re-Energising Indian Intelligence: A National Imperative

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Since time immemorial, the art and science of Intelligence remains an irreplaceable and a central constituent of statecraft. Unquestionably, it is also the first line of defence for a nation and if prudently utilised, a veritable force-multiplier. Among most nations, whenever a security catastrophe, a cataclysmic event or even a major geopolitical setback occurs, opprobrium is heaped on its intelligence set-ups even though such failures could be attributable, among other factors, to systemic shortcomings, faulty analyses, sheer negligence and/or leadership failures within the nation. Though lapses in intelligence acquisition and analyses may result in glaring security shortfalls and grave national embarrassment, on the other hand intelligence successes, normally, cannot be publicly acknowledged as “the practitioners of the art of intelligence have to be silent warriors for there is no place for drum-beating in the business of Intelligence.”¹

Challenges for Indian Intelligence Agencies

The criticality of timely intelligence acquisition, accurate interpretation and sound analyses coupled with a seamless flow of inputs to sister intelligence agencies/ governmental institutions, as required, brooks no elaboration but remains a compelling challenge for the intelligence agencies.

India, situated amidst a politically restive neighbourhood, confronts diverse and formidable challenges to its security and economic well-being. India has land borders with seven nations of over 15000 kms in length, a coastline of over 7683 kms besides 1197 islands and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of over two million sq kms in size. Additionally, India's strategic interests span a vast geographical expanse from the Malacca Straits in the east to the east coast of the African continent in India's west. Bordering an increasingly assertive and powerful China and a nuclear-armed

terror-exporting Pakistan, professional challenges to the Indian intelligence community are indeed mind-boggling. These further get compounded by internal security challenges the nation faces in Jammu and Kashmir, Northeast and from unabating left wing extremism (LWE).

Challenges, in today's troubled world, to the nation's security are not only military oriented or emanating from terrorism but encompass ever increasing multi-faceted threats spanning the entire spectrum of warfare and in the domains of land, sea, air, nuclear, space, cyber, energy resources, demographic changes apart from financial laundering, narco-related terrorism et al. Threats to the nation's internal security also emerge from societal instability attributable to communal, sectarian and caste-based flare-ups off and on.

Thus, it remains for the nation to critically assess whether its intelligence agencies are adequately structured and possess the wherewithal to pre-empt and thwart the myriad challenges to India's security, both in the external and internal dimensions. Reactiveness and knee-jerk reactions are endemic to the Indian psyche and systems and thus, the central government and the intelligence agencies themselves must determinedly introspect, in time bound frameworks, to review and assess the performance and revamping, where required, of the intelligence agencies in the fulfillment of their mandated missions.

Reforms: India's Intelligence Structures Since 1947

At the time of Independence, existed the Central Intelligence Bureau to oversee all intelligence activities and this was reorganised into the Intelligence Bureau (IB). Military intelligence, inherited from the British Indian Army was bifurcated between the two nations and also underwent some restructuring. In addition, each state police also had its own intelligence wing. In 1951, the Himmat Singhji Committee recommended that the IB should also look after external intelligence apart from its main role as the nodal agency for internal intelligence. In the fifties, insurgency in the North East prompted the IB to set-up the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB) to handle the peculiar intelligence problems of the North East. For counter-insurgency operations in

Nagaland and Manipur, much needed coordination between the IB, Army and state intelligence was established.

In the initial years, IB continued looking after both internal and external intelligence even during the 1962 conflict with China. After the 1962 conflict, the need to create capabilities for electronic intelligence (ELINT) and imagery from aerial based platforms in airspace was felt. Thus under the Directorate General of Security (DGS), the Aviation Research Centre (ARC) was created and placed under the overall control of the Director Intelligence Bureau (DIB). However, in September 1968, Prime Minister (PM) Indira Gandhi gave the go-ahead to establish an intelligence agency responsible exclusively for external intelligence to be called the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW). The DGS and ARC were shifted to the R&AW which was placed directly under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) as part of the Cabinet Secretariat. The existing Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) was bifurcated into the internal and external wings but later the split was reversed as it was rightly appreciated that terrorist movements within India drew sustenance from external agencies and countries and thus, intelligence analyses about them could not be assessed in isolation.

After the Emergency, the Morarji Desai government appointed the LP Singh Committee to go into the functioning and misuse of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the IB for political reasons. "The LP Singh Committee carved a legal framework and a charter of duties for the IB which was still functioning as it did before the departure of the British. The Committee also prepared for the consideration of the Government, detailed model chapters for adoption."² However, this committee's findings were shelved with the change of governments at the Centre. PM VP Singh, at the commencement of his tenure, announced the establishment of the National Security Council (NSC) to "take a holistic view of national security issues in the light of the external, economic, political and military situations and their linkages with our domestic concerns and objectives."³ However, the NSC never took off the ground owing to subsequent central governments not overly keen to let the NSC take over the work of the erstwhile Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA), later

redesignated as the Cabinet Committee for Security (CCS). The NSC came into existence with PM Atal Behari Vajpayee-appointed KC Pant Task Force in April 1998. The Task Force introduced the concept of the NSC with a full-fledged secretariat that merged the JIC with the NSC. This concept, with minor variations and streamlining continues till today and has been functioning, in its three tiers, effectively.

Kargil Review Committee (KRC)

A major restructuring in the evolution of the Indian intelligence edifice came in the aftermath of the 1999 Kargil War. Indian troops were totally surprised by large scale intrusions by Pakistani troops transgressing across the Line of Control (LC) and occupying some tactically significant heights in the Kargil Sector of Ladakh. The Kargil crisis led to the long required in-depth analysis of India's Higher Defence Management structures including its intelligence architecture by the Kargil Review Committee (KRC). Their comprehensive findings, chaired by the widely respected strategic analyst late K Subramanyam, were vetted by a Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by the then Deputy PM, LK Advani. The GoM appointed four task forces with the intelligence task force headed by former R&AW chief Gary Saxena. The task force made some admirable suggestions which were accepted by the then Vajpayee Government in 2000-01.

It is pertinent to point out that the KRC had succinctly noted that "..... there is no institutionalised mechanism for coordination or objective oriented interaction between intelligence agencies and consumers at different levels..... nor is there any oversight of the overall functioning of the agencies."⁴ The KRC had also opined that.... "the resources made available to the Defence Services are not commensurate with the responsibility assigned to them..... Indian intelligence structure is flawed since there is little backdrop or redundancy to rectify failures and shortcomings in intelligence collection and reporting."⁵ Another serious observation concluded by the GoM Report was that it was "neither healthy nor prudent to endow, notably R&AW with multifarious capabilities"⁶ for both human intelligence (HUMINT) and technical intelligence (TECHINT) capabilities.

Based on the path-breaking recommendations of the KRC, the four task forces and the GOM Report, the then GOI approved the establishment of an apex inter-services intelligence agency, namely the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), the National Technical Facilities Organisation, later rechristened as National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO), to which the technical assets were given from the erstwhile Aviation Research Centre which earlier belonged to the R&AW. The Task Force on Intelligence had also recommended the setting up of a Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) and a Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI) to be set up under the IB. The MAC was to collect and coordinate terrorism related information and the JTFI was to share information with the state governments. The government also streamlined and established the National Security Council (NSC), the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and various coordination for the macro-management of intelligence in a more cohesive manner.

Mumbai Terror Attack: 2008

Notwithstanding the streamlining of the nation's intelligence structure post the Kargil conflict, the dastardly terror attack in Mumbai in Nov 2008, master-minded by Pakistan's sinister ISI, brought to the fore glaring shortcomings in the nation's intelligence preparedness. Consequent to the furore in the nation and the government attributable to this ghastly tragedy, the then UPA Government announced the setting up of the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) and the National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID). However, only the NATGRID saw the light of the day and the commencement of NCTC remains mired in controversy. Nevertheless, an important step taken after the Mumbai terror strike was the government establishing the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The NIA is the sole federal agency legally mandated (by an Act of Parliament) to supersede the state Police Forces in investigation and prosecution of offenders for some specific offences. According to most security analysts, the NIA is carrying its manifold tasks in an effective manner.

Naresh Chandra Committee

In June 2011, the UPA 2 Government had constituted a Task Force under former Cabinet Secretary Naresh Chandra (since deceased) to conduct a holistic review of the nation's security preparedness and higher defence management structures including the appointment of the much discussed Chief of Defence Staff. As regards the intelligence reforms required, this Task Force recommended the creation of a National Intelligence Board for overseeing and coordination of the functioning of all civil and military agencies. It also recommended the appointment of an Intelligence Adviser to the NSA. With the change of government at the Centre in 2014, it appears the recommendations of this Task Force have been put into cold storage.

Shortcomings in Existing System and Suggested Remedial Measures

The Indian intelligence structure, presently, has 14 intelligence agencies in operation, with some involved in intelligence collection and a few having investigative roles. However, most of them work with undefined boundaries and overlapping mandates. Additionally, the absence of a single unified supervisory mechanism has affected the coordination of intelligence acquisition and intelligence assessments at the apex levels. Barring the NIA, all major intelligence agencies are carrying out their roles despite not being legally mandated!

(a) The NSC has a three tier set-up under the Prime Minister and was established in 1999. It concentrates on long term policy and national security policies. However, it is felt by many security analysts that the NSA has far too much work on his plate and thus requires a Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to coordinate the mind boggling intelligence load in the country and present his analyses to the NSA and thence to the NSC. The NSA has myriad strategic responsibilities, beyond defence, and should thus delegate macro intelligence responsibilities to a DNI. The temptation of becoming an "intelligence Czar" also, by the NSA, is best avoided. In addition, the NSC must formalize a long term perspective plan/ doctrinal document which forms the basis for comprehensive intelligence planning cum

acquisition in all domains of warfare across the entire spectrum of conflicts. However, the various tiers of the NSC must interact with greater frequency to ponder over many serious shortcomings in the nation's security preparedness and not be reactive in meeting both geo-political and security challenges to the nation's aspirations and interests.

(b) In many ways, the Joint Intelligence Committee is the apex intelligence assessment set-up of the country and comprises representatives from all intelligence agencies and its own specialists. The JIC does not collect intelligence on its own but its analyses are based on inputs from all intelligence agencies. Though it functions under the Cabinet Secretariat, it should be placed under the DNI if and when such an appointment is established. However, all intelligence agencies must speedily forward their inputs and intelligence analyses to the JIC without holding back information to be 'one-up' on the other sister agencies, a common malaise of some intelligence agencies.

(c) India's oldest intelligence agency, established since 1887, the Intelligence Bureau (IB), since 1968, is responsible for the internal security of the nation and works, more or less, as an appendage of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). India's internal security challenges are vast and varied, ranging from cross border terrorism, insurgencies in NE India, Islamic extremism, sectarian and communal flare-ups, narco-terrorism, money laundering, illegal migration, human trafficking and diverse international based crimes within the country. The IB, having a legacy of predominantly police personnel on its rolls, thus suffers from a shortage of specialists in the areas of IT, languages, cyber analysts, technical personnel and social scientists. The IB does require a cultural change in its modus operandi and needs to be unshackled from the total stranglehold of the MHA. Former Joint Director IB, Maloy Krishna Dhar has expressed that "...the perennial philosophers of the organization, vested interests of the IPS cadre and the political breed have scrupulously maintained the essential 'police culture' of the IB, almost as it were during Imperial days."⁷ In addition, state

police forces must be further strengthened and modernised, on the lines of recommendations made by many committees on police reforms. Such a step will relieve the IB of numerous grass-root commitments which can be dealt with adequately by the state police forces.

(d) R&AW is the sole external intelligence gathering agency in the nation since 1968, though the bulk of its technical intelligence (TECHINT) capabilities from its ARC were transferred in 2003 to the NTRO after many heated debates. Though, reportedly, it has generous budgets for its operations, yet the RAW could do better with direct recruitment of bright youngsters from the civil (rather than bulk transfers to it from police cadres). It needs substantial accretions in specialised linguistic experts, scientists, cyber analysts and military personnel from the three services. Since R&AW is chartered for acquisition of military intelligence as regards neighbouring nations, its military acquisition capabilities and subsequently its military intelligence assessments of external powers need to be further augmented. In addition, R&AW also requires to vastly upgrade its human intelligence (HUMINT) capabilities, especially, for executing covert operations in target countries. This organisation must work to develop its own cadre of highly skillful specialists in the disciplines required.

(e) With rapidly growing technological advancements touching every aspect of human endeavour and consequently impinging security in known and unknown dimensions, India's TECHINT responsible NTRO and the DIA have their work cut out. Though some redundancy is desirable, yet issues pertaining to satellite imagery, cyber intelligence and in the very near future, monitoring of space, should be addressed in a professional manner. Most intelligence agencies display a propensity for secretly developing their own TECHINT capabilities but greater coordination, mutual faith and a cooperative attitude is sine-qua-non for these intelligence agencies. As and when the Inter Services Cyber Command gets established, coordination between it, the DIA and the NTRO will have to

be ensured. The areas of COMINT, ELINT, IMINT and cyber intelligence, all part of TECHINT, will require fine-tuning in tasking, allocation of responsibilities and seamless coordination between all these TECHINT agencies.

(f) Barring the NIA, all other intelligence agencies are operating under executive orders of the government without any legal mandate. It is high time that even in a vibrant democracy like ours, some accountability and governmental oversight on intelligence agencies is ensured by parliamentary legislation as is the practice in many other democratic nations.

(g) The DIA, established in March 2002, as sequel to the KRC recommendations, had taken off to an encouraging start in coordinating the intelligence functioning of the three Services Intelligence Directorates (SIDs) and managing the strategic intelligence assets of the Services, namely the Defence Image Processing and Analysis Centre (DIPAC) and the Signals Intelligence Directorate. Some salient aspects pertaining to the re-energising of the DIA are mentioned in the succeeding paragraphs.

Strengthening Defence Intelligence

In its candid exposition, the KRC had opined that “the resources made available to the Defence Services are not commensurate with the responsibilities assigned to them.” The establishment thus of the DIA was indeed a welcome and landmark step in the field of military intelligence at the strategic level. Though the DIA, by any standards, is doing a commendable job since its raising, yet the MoD, in particular, and the Services Headquarters themselves have to do much more to ensure the optimal utilization of the DIA. Some steps to be speedily undertaken towards this goal are enumerated below:-

(a) The DIA has been assigned the role to coordinate the overall functioning of the three SIDs and prepare integrated military intelligence assessments for national security planners. This will only be largely possible if the SIDs report officially and directly to the Director General DIA. The current

loose arrangement is unsatisfactory and will remain so till the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff or till the Raksha Mantri so orders as regards the command and control of the DIA and the SIDs.

(b) The charter for acquisition of all military related intelligence including in the external dimension should be handed over to the DIA as R&AW has not been able to fulfill this responsibility adequately since years. The R&AW should continue with acquiring all external intelligence pertaining to the political, diplomatic and economic domains. The DIA thus must build up resources for HUMINT operations abroad specifically for military related missions.

(c) For enhancing the effectiveness of the military intelligence structure, creation of a Defence Intelligence Corps is strongly recommended. This Corps should have personnel from all the three Services and trained to be proficient in the diverse skills of intelligence tradecraft including linguistic skills in languages like Mandarin, Pashto, Dari, Persian, Arabic, Sinhalese, Burmese, Uzbeki, Kashmiri etc. as also in overt and covert operations, Information Technology and cyber warfare.

(d) The role of the Defence Attachés posted abroad from the three Services should be discreetly enlarged. In addition, suitable defence officers must be utilised in defence diplomacy roles, especially, in nations which have military/ quasi-military governments.

(e) The Military Intelligence School, Pune should be upgraded to a Defence Intelligence College for the three Services, the para-military and Central Police Organisations. Expertise should be drawn from all Indian intelligence agencies and also domain expertise in various aspects of intelligence skills from friendly foreign nations be utilised.

Conclusion

The formidable, diverse and complex security challenges to India will continue to deter the nation's rise unless all the constituents which make up our Comprehensive National Power, including in

the realm of Intelligence, are fully addressed with alacrity, resources and a long-term perspective. India, thus, needs to undertake time bound institutionalised reviews of its intelligence structures and undertake transformative reforms as required. To be slipshod in its attention to its Intelligence edifice will be at the nation's peril which India's history of the last seventy years has amply exhibited.

Endnotes

¹ Interview Lt Gen Kamal Davar in Rediff.mail, April 15, 2003

² Re-energising Indian Intelligence, Manoj Shrivastava, page 14, book published by CLAWS and Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, 2013.

³ Ibid.

⁴ K Subhramanyam, KRC Report: From Surprise to Reckoning, New Delhi 2000

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Maloy Krishan Dhar: Open Secrets: India's Intelligence Unveiled, New Delhi, Manas Publications, 2005, page 11.,

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