

# **Role of the Indian Armed Forces in Strategic Decision Making and Reclaiming the Strategic Space\***

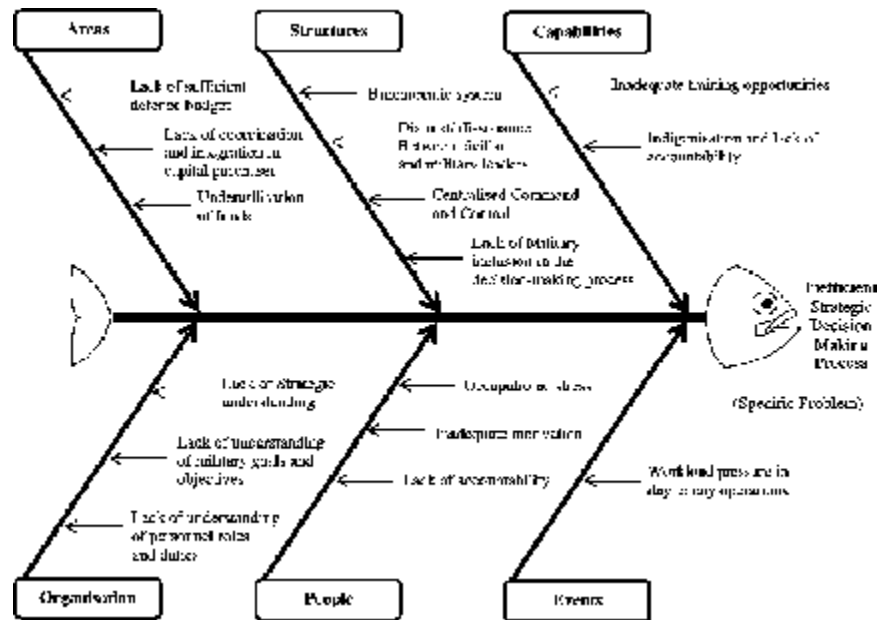
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## **Introduction**

**N**ational security remains the top most agenda for every country in the world today. Some nations, especially the developed ones, have well established and functioning military systems, while some other nations, in the developing world, lag behind in its national security structures. India is among those countries, that lacks a clear strategic management for the matters concerning national security, despite an urgent need for it.

India's military operates under an ill-structured strategic management system that has seen under-performance, despite attaining independence from the British rule and inheriting British system of parliamentary structure, judiciary, police, bureaucracy, and higher defence management (HDM). During the First and Second World Wars, Indian Army had an opportunity to participate in the war alongside British soldiers. However, there lacks evidence of a promising progress on strategic decision-making processes.

This calls for an urgent assessment of the national security framework to help in building a robust military system that is guided by informed strategic decisions. The article analyses the existing strategic environment of India and current situation of the military in the strategic decision-making process. Further, a brief comparison of the national security structures with other nations has been undertaken towards formulating recommendations that could be adopted to enable the Indian Armed Forces to play a greater role in strategic decision making.



### Analysis of the Existing Strategic Environment

The national security in India is managed by the National Security Council (NSC), comprising Strategic Policy Group (SPG) and the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB). Despite these organisations, the management of national security, from formulation of strategies to their implementation, is found wanting.

For Armed Forces to play greater role in strategic decision making, it becomes critical to understand the current shortcomings. Towards this, a fishbone analysis has been carried out to identify the aspects that have resulted in inefficient strategic decision-making process in India.

### Fishbone Analysis

A fishbone diagram, also called a cause and effect diagram, is a visualisation tool for categorising the potential causes for a specific problem or effect in order to identify its root causes. For the purpose of this article, the fishbone analysis is conducted using the areas, capabilities, structures, organisations, people, and events (ACSOPE) approach, which is an analysis affecting

the scope of strategic decision-making process in India. Various causes under the ACSOPE approach are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs and broad frame is depicted in **Figure** below:-

### **Issues Ailing the Strategic Decision-Making Process Structure.**

**(a) Bureaucratic System.** The ineffectiveness of the strategic management process of the Indian Armed Forces is mainly caused by a bureaucratic system exercised by the political leaders and high-level bureaucrats. Sufficiently senior Armed Forces officers are not included in organisations and structures charged with the responsibility of working out strategy and policy formulation for ensuring national security. Military professional inputs do not find adequate emphasis for evolving proper strategies and policy framework,

**(b) Distrust between Civilian and Military Leaders.** The political leaders seek to enhance their political gains at the expense of the people, without considering the potential repercussions adversely affecting the national security strategy over a prolonged period. There has been a rise in civilian and military distrust. Lack of harmony in relations is evident.

**(c) Centralised Command and Control.** India has a highly centralised command and control structure. Even though the country's strategic decision-making process is critical, the leadership in decision-making is centralised with few or no consultations regarding the decisions being undertaken. Differing opinions are usually suppressed with prohibition for management interrogation being placed for specific projects.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the command and control of the nuclear weaponry clearly indicates the absence of military involvement and input of their preferences in the nuclear weaponry programme; isolating the military personnel for implementation only.

**(d) Lack of Military-Inclusion in the Decision-Making Process.** According to General VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd) former Chief of the Indian Army, the political

leadership continues to segregate the Army in the decision making processes claiming that a 'lack of trust' exists between the civilian and the military officials. With the military being a major stakeholder in the strategic operations of the country, a lack of involvement of the military leadership has led to fractured and flawed decision making in matters of defence management and strategic policies leading to crippled military operations.<sup>2</sup>

### **Organisation.**

**(a) Lack of Strategic Understanding.** Despite the existence of the NSC, the strategic management gets compromised due to personal interests of political leaders and lack of military inclusivity in decision making processes.<sup>3</sup> This has crippled the strategic management of the country, as decisions are being implemented in a sub-optimal and ambiguous manner.

**(b) Lack of Understanding of Role, Goal and Duties of Military Personnel.** The internal operations of an organisation determine the achievement of its strategic decisions. In the case of the Indian Armed Forces, most civil personnel suffer from lack of awareness concerning their role, vision, and strategy. There is also role conflict in the assignment of duties among the personnel.

### **Areas.**

**(a) Lack of Sufficient Defence Budget and Integrated Approach.** India's defence budget is less than two per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It should be minimum three per cent of the GDP. Compared to China, India's defence budget is mere 33 per cent. Lack of sufficient funds has led to degradation in operational capabilities of the three Services. Further, the decision-making process lacks integration and coordination in capital allocation and acquisition of weapon systems for the three Services.

**(b) Underutilisation of Funds.** An analysis of the capital acquisitions during the Financial Years 2009-10 and 2015-16 indicates perpetual under-utilisation of the budgeted

amounts.<sup>4</sup> It is bound to erode operational capability of units and formations of the three Services in the long run.

### **Capabilities.**

(a) **Lack of Opportunity for Collective Training.** A large number of units and formations are deployed for countering militancy and terrorism involving sub unit operations. Training at unit and formation levels is suffering which adversely affects readiness for war.

(b) **Indigenisation and Lack of Accountability.** India needs to develop and produce indigenous military hardware to be self-reliant as well as exercise economy. Some of the defence establishments are not performing optimally. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), has not been meeting targets set for them and there appears to be lack of accountability. The scenario needs to change in the interest of promoting efficiency.

**People.** The military personnel form the core group for achievement of strategic security. Notwithstanding the fact that there exists discord between the military and the civil bureaucracy, the military personnel suffer from low motivation and occupational stress. This emanates from lack of state of the art weapons and equipment as well as military support from higher management.<sup>5</sup>

**Events.** The military personnel face workload pressure as they are required to work for long hours. They get insufficient rest and often have to achieve difficult targets.<sup>6</sup> Coupled with their inability to express grievances to the management, their stress level goes up considerably.

### **Comparison of National Security Decision-Making Model with Other Nations**

The decision-making models in various countries are sculpted to meet the national security needs of the country which is usually developed for roles such as joint assessment in evaluating decision-making, policies, resource allocation for dealing with threats, oversight roles, prioritising security needs and coordinating emergency actions by the designated bodies.<sup>7</sup>

**Basis for Formulation of Security Models.** For developed nations, the main concerns for the national security revolve around the well-being and the stability of the nation. On the contrary, the developing nations have their national security concerns around the socio-economic matters. More so, for the jurisdictions recovering from past conflicts, the national security is also concerned with promoting culpability and transparency in the national security systems and building the public confidence in the security system. The strategic decision-making structures and processes, therefore, are formulated to meet the needs of the countries.

**Developed Nations' Security Model.** Developed nations such as the US, the UK, and Canada have centralised structures, which are entrusted with decision making. The mandate of the offices could be coordination, implementation or assessment of policy. The NSC in the US is an example of the policy initiator independent of the implementation role. In the UK, Canada, and South Africa, the bodies are entrusted with both initiation and implementation of security policies.<sup>8</sup> In India, the role of decision-making is centralised in the Office of the Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup> The effectiveness of the centralised structures, as seen in the developed countries, is lacking in India. On the contrary, India's centralised structure has devastated the national security system as many a time, decisions are made and carried out for selfish political gains.<sup>10</sup>

**Sierra Leone Model.** Sierra Leone, a small developing country, has been successful in establishing a national security structure that deals with the backbone of the security concerns, which are poverty and national development. The decision-making process is under the Office of National Security, which is apolitical in nature. The office has built transparency and accountability in the national security system by coordinating the civilian and military roles in decision-making. The aim is to build an enabling environment for development.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, India's strategic decision-making system lacks transparency and accountability as power oscillates around specific circles of individuals.<sup>12</sup>

**Recommended Security Model.** On matters regarding the involvement of both the civilian and military input in the decision-making process, the US remains an outstanding example of

successful integration. The US NSC incorporates the viewpoints of both the civilian and military.<sup>13</sup> This has enabled the US to formulate and implement the strategic decisions concerning the military with fruitful results. On the other hand, India has been lagging behind by excluding its military from the decision-making process, leading to under-performance of the military sector.<sup>14</sup> The segregation has created a disparity between the military, the political leaders, and the civilian bureaucrats. There is a lack of coordination in executing decisions, which is a peril to the national security that can be exploited by the adversaries.

### **Recommendations for Conclusive Strategic Decision-Making Process**

**Civil-Military Inclusivity.** Based on the long-term goal of having India as a self-reliant nation in the field of security weapons, the decision-making process will require input from different angles to have an all-encompassing, detailed structure and processes. The strategic decision-making process in India stands to gain if it incorporates civil-military inclusivity in the decision-making process. One of the benefits of an inclusive structure is that the process will benefit from diverse ideas from the two distinct groups and enhance the efficiency of strategic decision-making process multi-fold. Besides, the inclusivity will augment an environment for building trust, amongst the stakeholders in particular, and the citizens of India at large.

**Establishment of an Oversight Body over the Strategic Decision-Making Process.** The national security decision-making system should also establish an oversight body to oversee the formulation and implementation of the strategic decisions being made. The oversight body, partly comprising of Armed Forces personnel, will act as an audit mechanism to delineate the merits and demerits of the policy making and implementation system. The decision-making bodies will also gain tremendously from these oversight bodies by segregating and restructuring the beneficial policies and processes. Also, the oversight body will reveal the discrepancies of the strategic decision-making programmes and streamline them to derive full benefits. This will aid in removing the bottlenecks from the strategic decision-making process that impede effective alignment with the ultimate security goals of the country. The set-up would also keep a check on the

net results obtained by civilian agencies like DRDO and defence Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) thereby, contributing towards enhanced transparency and accountability that would promote confidence.

**Establishment of a “Tri-Services Joint Think Tank”.** To further fortify the role of Armed Forces manifold, in strategic decision-making process, institution of a “tri-services joint think tank” within the defence organisation is considered essential. The think-tank will help in promoting jointness and integrated decision making in the Armed Forces providing qualitative strategic decisions through the Chiefs of Staff Committee. It will encourage dissemination of ideas from all across the Forces. Further, the think tank will facilitate enmeshing the military view point into the national security decision-making process.

**Operational Efficiency.** Besides having a civil-military inclusive structure, the decision-making structure should also develop mechanisms enhancing the operational efficiency of the military. Some of the approaches are proper training of the military leadership and the personnel. The leaders should be well-trained for proper management of the various security operations. Not only will the exercise build confidence in the leaders, but they will also be better positioned to identify and forecast threats early. The leaders will also be equipped with the capacity to handle their subordinates, improving which will aid in reducing occupational stress for them, hence, their performance. The military leadership and personnel should also be well trained to have a proper articulation of the military's goals and objectives, as well as their respective roles and responsibilities. A proper understanding of the goals and objectives will go a long way in easing implementation of the laid out strategies as well as create a platform where the personnel can have inputs in decision-making system. A clear understanding of their respective roles and duties will help in efficient and effective execution of strategy worked out for conduct of operations.

**Training and Exposure of Civil Bureaucrats Involved in National Security Policy Formulation.** Bureaucrats involved in national security policy transformation should have sufficient knowledge about functioning of the Armed Forces. Their training should encapsulate mandatory aspects of strategy formulation,



policy development, risk management and control. This will help in identifying and forecasting threats promptly and boost their confidence in decision-making.

**Resource Allocation.** The national security decision-making system should incorporate policies outlining the criteria for resource allocation for military purpose. It should be linked to need of operational capability desired. The policies will aid in optimal procurement of military hardware and division of resources to the different sectors. Besides, the policies will help in prioritising tasks involved in the strategic decision-making process.

**Strategic Partnerships with Other Countries.** Another consideration for the strategic decision-making is the significant role played by the Armed Forces towards developing beneficial strategic partnerships or in enhancement of the already existing partnerships. These partnerships coupled with development of appropriate foreign policies, will propel India towards achieving national respect across the globe and will help India in dealing with potential threats especially from China and Pakistan. The Armed Forces could thus play a crucial role in strategic-decision making process as the participating bodies will be keen to ensure that the requirements of the partnerships are met.

**Consideration of the Political and Security Environment.** The nature of the environment has an impact on the decisions that can be made at a particular time. Priorities during decision-making are important to distinguish how long each decision will take to be implemented. The Armed Forces need to make strategies on short-term and long-term basis that need to be handled based on the security and political conditions in the country during the decision making period.<sup>15</sup> The defence forces should ensure that their ideas or decisions are not influenced by external parties or any political groups.

### **Conclusion**

While India boasts of having a high power rating index of the military in the world, the strategic decision-making process of the nation suffers a great deal due to manipulation of the process adopted by India's polity and civil bureaucracy. A major grievance is the lack of involvement of the military in the decision-making process, despite being an important element of national security.

The dissonance is based on the civilian view that the military is an agency that ought to act on the policies formulated and need not be part of the strategic management process, including formulation of strategy and policies.<sup>16</sup>

The recommendations brought out in this article will assist in greater role being played by the Indian Armed Forces towards strengthening the position of India's national security and strategic management, both in the short-term and in the long-term. It would establish inherent strategic stability in the national security system and aid the country in building a suitable and efficient strategic decision-making process.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Vadlamudi S (2014), 'Auditing India's Strategic Sector' <http://www.rediff.com/news/2004/feb/19guest.htm>. Accessed on 11 Aug 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> White, 'Command and Control of India's Nuclear Forces,' (The Nonproliferation Review, Volume 21, 2014, Issue 3-4), p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> Nirupama Soundararajan and Dnyanada Palkar, (2016) 'State Of Economic Decision-Making Within The Armed Forces Is Deteriorating' <https://thewire.in/71373/economic-decision-making-within-indian-armed-forces-deteriorating/>. Accessed on 12 Aug 2017

<sup>5</sup> Sharma S, (2015), 'Occupational Stress in the Armed Forces: An Indian Army Perspective', (IIMB Management Review, Volume 27, Issue 3, September 2015), p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Bearne Susanna and others, (2005), 'National Security Decision-Making Structures and Security Sector Reform' [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical\\_reports/2005/RAND\\_TR289.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2005/RAND_TR289.pdf). Accessed 12 Aug 2017

<sup>8</sup> Nirupama Soundararajan and Dnyanada Palkar, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Bearne Susanna and others *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Kulkarni P (2014), 'Politicisation of the Indian Bureaucracy', Available at [indianperiodical.com/2014/politicization-of-the-indian-bureaucracy/](http://indianperiodical.com/2014/politicization-of-the-indian-bureaucracy/). Accessed on 01 Aug 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Bearne Susanna and others, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Vadlamudi S, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Nirupama Soundararajan and Dnyanada Palkar, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Jose PR Marg, (2017), '*Civil-Military Relations in India*'. Available at <https://brookings.edu/events/civil-military-relations-in-india/>. Accessed 15 Jul 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Gokhale, N (2013). '*The Indian Army's Role in Nation Building - Fair Observer*'. Available at: [https://www.fairobservers.com/region/central\\_south\\_asia/indian-armys-role-nation-building/](https://www.fairobservers.com/region/central_south_asia/indian-armys-role-nation-building/). Accessed 01 Aug 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Jose PR Marg, *op. cit.*

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