Dimensions of Intelligence Operations

Shri B Raman, IPS (Retd)

INTRODUCTION

There is a clear distinction between an intelligence process and an intelligence operation. When one talks of an intelligence process, one has in mind the various stages in the evolution of intelligence–its collection, evaluation,analysis,assessment and follow-up action. The expression "intelligence operation" as used in this paper restricts itself to the first stage in this entire scale of evolution–namely, the collection of intelligence, and tends to exclude from consideration the other stages in the evolution, which are as important as the collection, if not more.

In intelligence parlance, one uses the expression "intelligence operation" essentially with reference to two aspects of the functioning of an intelligence agency–its ability to collect secret,precise and timely intelligence of relevance to national security and to undertake covert actions, if need be in furtherance of national security objectives, if called upon to do so by the political leadership.

These two are the most sensitive aspects of the functioning of an agency, but not necessarily the most decisive aspects in terms of safeguarding national security. Analysis, assessment and follow-up action tend to be more decisive in this regard. A wealth of precise secret intelligence may not help in safeguarding national security if ill or inadequately analysed with unsatisfactory follow-up action. On the other hand, even incomplete intelligence, if well analysed and assessed and promptly and effectively acted upon, can often safeguard national security.

It would, therefore, be necessary to deal with the entire gamut of the intelligence evolution instead of restricting oneself to only

---

Shri B Raman is a former Additional Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India. Presently he is Director, Institute for Topical Studies, Chennai, and Distinguished Fellow and Convenor, Observer Research Foundation, Chennai Chapter.

Excerpted text of second Major General Samir Sinha Memorial Lecture delivered at the United Service Institution of India on 26 April 2004.

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CXXXIV, No. 556, April-June 2004.

one stage of it, namely, the collection operation. There are two ways of dealing with the subject–in general terms by discussing the basic principles and concepts which govern the entire process or in specific terms by discussing some instances which are considered as landmarks in the evolution of the intelligence profession because of the lessons which they imparted to the cognoscenti, provided they had the desire and the ability to learn the right lessons. I propose to adopt the second.

All serious breaches of national security and all instances in which the national security managers, in the political leadership as well as in the policy-making bureaucracy, are taken by surprise, either by state or by non-state actors, have an intelligence-related cause and effect. For analysing this intelligence-related cause and effect, all instances of failures to safeguard national security can be attributed to one of the following five causes :-

(a) Zero intelligence.

(b) Inadequate intelligence.

(c) Inaccurate intelligence.

(d) Excessive or an overload of often irrelevant intelligence

(e) Inadequate follow-up action on the available intelligence, whether adequate or inadequate.

ZERO INTELLIGENCE

Falkland Islands

A typical example of zero secret intelligence was the failure of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) of the UK, popularly known as MI-6, to collect intelligence regarding the plans of the Argentinian Government to send its Armed Forces to occupy the Falkland Islands in 1982. Lord Franks, who constituted the one-man Commission, which enquired into this failure, brought on record the fact that the MI-6 had failed to detect the Argentine plans for the occupation, but held, at the same time, that it could not be held responsible for this failure because the British Government had not endowed it with the capability for the collection of such secret

intelligence. Its proposal long before the war for the sanction of an intelligence collection post under diplomatic cover in the British Embassy in Buenos Aires had been rejected by the Foreign Office. In the light of this, the MI-6 was absolved of any responsibility for the failure. After having done so, the Commission had pointed out that even if secret intelligence was not available, adequate open source intelligence in the form of media reports and despatches from the British Embassy in Buenos Aires was available, which, if it had been adequately analysed, would have served as a wake-up call to the Government and prompted it to rush the Navy to prevent the occupation of the islands. The Falkland Enquiry highlighted certain important aspects of the various dimensions of the intelligence process as under :-

(a) The importance of a physical presence of an intelligence agency in a targeted country, either under a diplomatic or a non-diplomatic cover, before it can be expected to collect secret intelligence of relevance to national security from that country.

(b) The importance of a systematic monitoring of open source intelligence, whether adequate secret intelligence is available or not.

(c) The importance of continuous and timely analysis of all intelligence having a bearing on a development, whether open or secret.

(d) The importance of reverse analysis of a development, that is analysing a development not from your own perspective, but from the perspective of an adversary.

(e) The importance of the analysis and assessment machinery existing and functioning independently without letting itself be influenced in its analysis and assessment by the pre-conceived ideas, conventional wisdom and political compulsions of the policy makers, whether they be of the political leadership or the policy-making bureaucracy.

Importance of Physical Presence

A physical presence in the targeted country is the sine qua

non of any successful intelligence collection operation. While it is for the political leadership and the policy-making bureaucracy to lay down the tasks of the intelligence agencies, it is for the agencies to decide what presence they would require, where and how, for fulfilling those tasks. Very often, the intelligence agencies are denied this due to the followings :-

(a) The Foreign Office or other policy-making ministries with no responsibility for intelligence collection tend to arrogate to themselves the right to impose their non-professional judgement over the professional judgement of the intelligence agencies as to what collection presence they should have, where and how. The result–national security failures. The Falkland incident was only one such instance. There are many such instances strewn across the histories of the intelligence agencies of many countries, including India.

(b) The disruption of diplomatic relations with a targeted country, which denies the Foreign Office as well as the intelligence agencies the benefits of a physical presence in that country. A typical example would be the difficulties faced by the US intelligence in Iraq. The non-existence of diplomatic relations between Iraq and the US since 1991 came in the way of the US being able to collect secret intelligence from Iraqi policy-making circles in Baghdad.

When an intelligence agency does not have a presence in the capital of a targeted country, it has other options such as trans-border and third country operations and exploitation of the presence of other countries and international organisations in the targeted country. That is what the US intelligence sought to do. It ran trans-border operations into Iraq from neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It ran third-country operations from countries, which were not neighbours of Iraq, by recruiting agents from amongst anti-Saddam political exiles in the US and West Europe. It took advantage of the presence of the UN inspection teams in Iraq by penetrating its intelligence officers into those teams.

It ultimately found that in the absence of an intelligence collection presence in Baghdad with the capability to penetrate

Government, military and scientific establishments in the capital, alternate means such as those described above alone did not provide it with the required intelligence, relating to the existence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or the intentions and capabilities of the Iraqi Armed Forces or the attitude of the Iraqi population as a whole to the Saddam regime on the one hand and to the US-led attempts for a regime change on the other.

Excessive reliance for the collection of human intelligence (HUMINT) on third-country-based anti-Saddam political exiles led to the agencies being willfully misled by such elements which had their own axe to grind. The penetration of the US intelligence officers into the UN inspection teams did not produce the required results by way of HUMINT collection.

Since the US-led occupation of Iraq in April 2003, the US intelligence agencies, both civilian and military, have an ubiquitous presence in Iraq and, yet, their HUMINT collection capability remains poor as seen from the serious difficulties faced by the US Armed Forces in dealing with the resistance movement and the activities of jihadi terrorists, who have infiltrated from outside. This is due to the fact that the US intelligence is now required to collect HUMINT not about an adversary state and its military apparatus, which have collapsed, but about innumerable non-state actors who have taken to arms against the occupation forces and the fledgling new state machinery being created by the occupation forces. The Iraqi war and its sequel have already had two important lessons for intelligence professionals. Those are :-

(a) An intelligence presence alone in the targeted country or area is not sufficient unless that presence has the required penetration capability.

(b) It is more difficult to collect intelligence, particularly HUMINT, about a non-state adversary than about a state adversary.

All secret intelligence collection, whether it be HUMINT or technical intelligence (TECHINT), is the result of penetration. One collects HUMINT by penetrating the adversary's set-up through human sources. One collects TECHINT by penetrating through

technical means. A well-established state, with a visible, concrete and identifiable structure, is easier to penetrate than an amorphous non-state adversary with no such structure. Traditional tradecraft used for the penetration of state adversaries may not serve the purpose of penetration of non-state actors. Moreover, while the penetration of a state actor poses no ethical problems, that of a non-state actor, particularly terrorist groups, poses ethical problems. Such ethical problems arise from the fact that a human agent used for penetrating a terrorist organisation may be called upon by its leadership to carry out an assassination in order to prove his or her credibility. Should the handling officer of the source condone such acts of criminality in order to be able to penetrate the terrorist organisation? It is a question which has remained without answers.

Penetration through technical means for the collection of TECHINT is an important component of all intelligence collection operations, whether in respect of state or non-state adversaries. Many successful preventive actions were attributable to successsful technical penetrations. The US intelligence agencies have scored many tactical successes against Al Qaeda because of their successful penetration of its communications set-up, but they have not scored any strategic success because only HUMINT collected through successful penetration can facilitate a strategic break-through. Moreover, when an adversary avoids the use of modern means of communications and observes effective communications security, penetration through technical means becomes difficult, if not impossible. That is what has been happening in Iraq. The resistance fighters have been avoiding communicating with each other through technical means and the US has till now not been able to clearly identify its adversaries and establish their organisational structure. With the result, there has been very little flow of either HUMINT or TECHINT.

The Lessons

The fist lesson is that there is no substitute for good HUMINT. While some HUMINT of a peripheral and sometimes even of a preventive nature can come from the interrogation of arrested suspects and itinerant trans-border and observer sources, a substantial and sustained flow of HUMINT of good quality can

come only through successful penetrations. Such operations, inter alia, require good linguistic capability in the handling officers, a good knowledge of the culture and psyche of the society targeted, identification of dissatisfied sections of that society which might be willing to co-operate with the handling officer and their intelligent exploitation. This is something to be achieved over a long period and cannot be done overnight as the US is learning in Iraq.

Flow of secret and valuable HUMINT through successful penetrations has to be an important yard-stick for evaluating the performance of intelligence agencies. In the USA and other countries, it has been laid down that the performance of the agencies would be evaluated on the basis of the secret HUMINT of relevance to national security supplied by them to the security forces, policy-makers and other consumers. Despite this, there has been no significant improvement in their performance, particularly in respect of non-state actors because on grounds of agent security, intelligence agencies have been resisting any external evaluation of their operational capability. It has remained largely an in-house affair, with no scope for a flow of objective criticism and ideas for improvement from outside the agencies. This is a matter, which needs careful examination, if HUMINT capability has to improve. This applies as much to India as to any other country.

The second lesson from the Falkland failure, which continues to have validity even today, is the importance of open source intelligence. In the look-out of the collection and assessment agencies for secret intelligence, a large volume of open intelligence on Argentina's possible intentions and plans was not given the attention it deserved until it was too late to act on it. This open intelligence came to the British Foreign Office from two sources— the Argentinian and the US media and the despatches of the British diplomats posted in Argentina on the basis of their discussions with local Government officials and diplomats of other countries.

Since there was no secret intelligence from the MI-6 indicating the possibility of an Argentine invasion, open intelligence indicating such a possibility was not taken seriously either in the Foreign Office or in the Joint Intelligence Committee(JIC). The enquiry identified three major deficiencies— the absence of a systematic

dissemination and analysis of open intelligence having a bearing on national security; the absence of the practice of reverse analysis of available intelligence from the perspective of the adversary; and the absence of independent thinking of the Chairman of the JIC.

At the time of the Falkland invasion, an officer of the British Foreign Office, with a rank equivalent to that of an Additional Secretary in the Government of India, used to act concurrently as the JIC Chairman. It was said that he was influenced by the then prevailing wisdom in the Foreign Office that Argentina would bark, but never bite and any open source intelligence, which indicated otherwise, was not taken seriously by him. The Franks Commission recommended the strengthening of the analysis and assessment capability of the JIC and the appointment of an independent expert with easy access to the Prime Minister as the Chairman.

Despite this, things have not improved in the British JIC as one had seen by the less than objective manner in which it had functioned in the period preceding the invasion of Iraq and had apparently allowed itself to be influenced by Prime Minister Tony Blair in its analysis and assessment of intelligence relating to the presence of WMD in Iraq and the imminence of the threat from Iraq's chemical and biological warfare capability.

Analysis and assessment have also been the Achilles heel of the security apparatus in the US as was seen in the way the pre-11 September 2001 reports relating to Al Qaeda's presence in the US homeland and the threat posed by it to the US homeland and Iraq's WMD capability were analysed and assessed by the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS). Just as the JIC in the UK let itself be influenced by the Iraqi agenda of Blair, the NSCS too let itself be influenced in its analysis and assessment and in its identification of operational priorities by the Iraqi agenda of President Bush and his close neo-conservative advisers. The decision to go to war in Iraq was made not on the basis of an objective assessment of available intelligence relating to its WMD capability, its alleged links with Al Qaeda and the likely popularity of such an invasion with the Iraqi people, but on the basis of the ideological predilections of Bush and his neo-conservative advisers.

The decision to go to war was first made in their mind and only then the available open and secret intelligence reports were examined in order to choose those which can be used before the US public opinion and the international community for justifying the decision. Dubious secret intelligence supplied by anti-Saddam political exiles indicating the imminence of a WMD threat was accepted and played up and credible open and semi-open intelligence from the media and the reports and observations of the UN inspectors, which seriously doubted or dismissed such claims, was rejected.

The Situation in India

How good is the Indian analysis and assessment machinery? Has a similar thing happened in India? Or, can it happen in future? A study of the Lord Franks report by the Government of India in 1983 led to two decisions to strengthen the JIC. Firstly, to bifurcate the JIC—one to analyse and assess threats to internal security and the other to deal with external security. The need for a separate JIC to deal with internal security was felt because of the persistence of tribal insurgency in the North-East and its spread to Tripura. The second decision related to the appointment of officers of the Indian Police Service from the intelligence agencies as heads of the external JIC. The argument advanced by the intelligence agencies, which were the driving force behind this decision, in favour of it was that only professional intelligence officers could tone up the working of the JIC.

While the decision to bifurcate the JIC was reversed after the death of Mrs Indira Gandhi in October 1984, the practice of appointing intelligence officers as heads of the re-unified JIC continued till the Kargil conflict in 1999. In 1998, a reported request by the Army that the officers of its intelligence directorate should also be considered for appointment as the JIC Chairman led to an impasse which continued for months, with the head of the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) being asked to hold additional charge as the JIC Chairman.

Successive Governments devalued the JIC to such an extent that senior officers of the intelligence producing and consuming agencies stopped attending its weekly meetings and deputed junior

officers, often of the rank of Under-Secretaries, to attend them and the intelligence directorate of the Army even stopped disseminating the military intelligence collected by it to the JIC. The Kargil Review Committee (KRC), which enquired into intelligence and operational deficiencies preceding the Kargil conflict, had pointed out that during a period of two years preceding the Kargil conflict the Military Intelligence Directorate had hardly shared any military intelligence with the JIC.

The Special Task Force for the Revamping of the Intelligence Apparatus set up by the Government of India in 2000 of which I was a member, had made a statistical analysis of the number of reports shared by the R&AW, the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Directorate-General of Military Intelligence (DGMI) with the JIC in the months preceding the Kargil conflict and found that while the R&AW and the IB continued to share their reports with the JIC, there was a steep drop in the number of reports shared by the DGMI. When a representative of the Army, who had interacted with the Task Force, was asked about the reasons for this decline, he replied, "The Army is the end-user of all military intelligence. It is, therefore, immaterial whether it shares its MI reports with the JIC or not."

Was Sri Lanka India's mini Iraq? Was the initiative for the Indian involvement there taken by the political leadership on its own or at the instance of the Army or the intelligence agencies? Did the JIC play any advisory role in the matter? It is difficult to answer these questions in the absence of authentic information about the decision-making process in matters relating to Sri Lanka. It is a pity no case study has been made of how the highly sensitive Sri Lanka operation was handled at various levels—at the political, operational and diplomatic. It would be a good case study of how not to handle a sensitive intelligence operation. Apparently, an example of too many cooks spoiling the broth.

The lack of professionalism in the manner in which we handle the important task of intelligence analysis and assessment became evident in our handling of the sequel to the Mumbai blasts of March,1993. Two separate and ad hoc groups came into existence in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)—one reporting to the then

Home Minister and the other to the then Minister of State for Internal Security—to monitor and assess all terrorism-related intelligence and co-ordinate the follow-up action, each often not knowing what the other was doing and with the JIC's role in the analysis and assessment of terrorism-related intelligence downgraded. In many instances, the then Chairman of the JIC was kept out of many of these meetings.

The creation of a NSCS in 1999 and the merging of the JIC with it were meant to correct the erratic functioning of the JIC before the Kargil conflict. Has this led to an improvement in our capability for analysis and assessment? Have we been able to develop an expertise in the analysis and assessment of intelligence relating to state and non-state adversaries? The Special Task Force on the Revamping of the Intelligence Apparatus had recommended a role for the NSCS in the co-ordination of the performance of the intelligence agencies. How effectively is this role being performed? Are any corrections called for? Now that it is five years since the new national security management infrastructure was set up, the time has come for an external evaluation of its performance by a group of independent experts.

Open Source Intelligence

The Brown-Aspen Commission set up by the Clinton Administration in the US to look into the functioning of the intelligence agencies had underlined the importance of systematic monitoring of open intelligence for two reasons. First, if the intelligence agencies do not do so, they would not know what intelligence is already available from open sources and would be wasting time and money for collecting, through HUMINT operations, something which is already available. Second, any assessment based only on secret intelligence could be incomplete and misleading.

The Task Force on the Revamping of the Intelligence Apparatus had drawn the attention of our Government to the tremendous potential of the internet as a source of open intelligence and stressed the importance of setting up a nodal agency for data mining from the internet and sharing it with all agencies of the intelligence community as well as all traditional consumers of secret intelligence.

This is an aspect which needs attention, if this has not already been acted upon.

The importance of reverse analysis as one of the analytical tools was underlined by the report of the in-house enquiry into the failure of the US intelligence to anticipate the decision of the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)-led Government to have the Pokhran-II nuclear tests. The report pointed out that no attempt was made by a group of experts in the State Department to put themselves in the place of the BJP and analyse what options they would have to strengthen their political position, which was wobbly, at that time. It was felt that they might have concluded that one good option available to strengthen their political position was to carry out the nuclear tests.

Mumbai Blasts and Rajiv's Assassination

A typical Indian example of zero secret intelligence was the Mumbai explosions of March,1993. Neither the IB nor the R&AW had the least inkling of the preparations for the explosions, which had been going on for at least a month before they took place—such as recruitment of volunteers for organising the explosions, their travel to Pakistan via Dubai for training and their return to Mumbai, the clandestine landing of explosives, hand-grenades and other weapons from Pakistan by Dawood's gang and their secret storage.

The intelligence agencies—the IB in Mumbai and the R&AW in Dubai—were totally clueless about the clandestine goings-on till the explosions took place. Interestingly, within a few hours of the explosions, the IB and the Mumbai Police managed to establish the identities of those responsible and how they had planned and carried out the explosions and the R&AW played a remarkable role in obtaining documentary evidence of the role of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in their training and in the hunt for the perpetrators, many of whom were arrested in Kathmandu and elsewhere and brought to India largely on the basis of valuable secret intelligence collected by the R&AW.

The question, which should have been addressed, but was not, was: if the intelligence agencies had the remarkable operational

capability for collecting secret intelligence after the explosions, how was it that this capability failed to anticipate the explosions and to prevent them by collecting intelligence about the preparations? A similar question had confronted us after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in May,1991. Unlike the Mumbai explosions, Rajiv's assassination was more a case of inadequate intelligence, like the Kargil conflict of 1999, than one of zero intelligence.

In 1989, when the VP Singh Government, after coming to office, had ordered an assessment of likely threats to Rajiv Gandhi as the leader of the Opposition, the R&AW had correctly assessed that the threats to him during his travels in North India and abroad would come mainly from the Sikh terrorists and that threats during his travels in South India would come mainly from the Sri Lankan Tamil terrorist elements with a base in Indian territory. Moreover, subsequently, the West German intelligence had twice passed on a warning that a Sri Lankan Tamil living in West Germany, who was frequently visiting Chennai, had the reputation of being an explosive expert.

Thus, the R&AW's analytical capability had proved to be remarkably prescient as a result of which it was the only agency which came out of the Verma Commission of Enquiry almost totally unscathed. During the investigation of the assassination, no evidence emerged to show that the visits of the suspected explosive expert from West Germany to Chennai were in any way connected with the preparations of the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the assassination. Despite this, in retrospect, one felt that all the intelligence agencies should have alerted their sources in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka and tried to find out whether the LTTE was up to anything sinister. They did alert their HUMINT sources, but they could not pick up any intelligence about the plans and preparations of the LTTE to carry out the assassination, and their TECHINT means were not effectively utilised before the assassination.

Remarkably, within a few days of the assassination, the intelligence agencies managed to establish the involvement of the LTTE and the TECHINT Division of the R&AW managed to track down from minute to minute the movement of the survivors among

the perpetrators by intercepting their communications with their headquarters and repeatedly breaking the LTTE's code. This ultimately led to their being cornered in Bangalore and their subsequent suicide before they could be captured.

A question, which should have been addressed, but was not, was: if the TECHINT Division of the R&AW had such a remarkable capability for intercepting the LTTE's communications and breaking its code as was demonstrated after the assassination, why this capability failed to detect the arrival of the assassination team in Chennai and its subsequent movements and preparations? The Jain Commission was reported to have found that the IB did intercept some coded communications of the LTTE having a bearing on the assassination, but did not have the capability to break the code used at the time the messages were intercepted. It was reportedly broken much later after the assassination.

The position apparently was: the IB was intercepting more coded messages than the R&AW, but did not have the capability to break their code. The R&AW had the capability to break the code, but had not intercepted the messages which were intercepted by the IB. The IB did not inform the R&AW that it had some coded communications and whether it could help to break them. The R&AW did not share with the IB the information that it had the capability to break the LTTE's code and tell it that it might be able to help in breaking any coded messages intercepted by it.

In his interaction with the Special Task Force on the Intelligence Apparatus, a senior official of the Government of India, who headed a Ministry which is one of the consumers of intelligence, mentioned that his own assessment was that the Indian intelligence agencies were excellent investigating agencies after a breach of national security had taken place, but had very limited capability for anticipating and preventing such breaches. The criticism is partly invalid, partly valid.

It is invalid in the sense that there were innumerable instances in which the intelligence agencies had played a stellar role in collecting secret preventive intelligence, but public knowledge of it had remained limited for valid operational reasons. Such

intelligence was effectively used by the physical security agencies in some cases to prevent breaches of national security, but in some cases their failure to act on them led to serious breaches, despite specific intelligence being available.Some examples being the aborted attempt to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi at Rajghat in October 1986, the neutralisation of many terrorist leaders of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir (J and K) and the Purulia arms drop of 1995.

It is valid in the sense that, despite such good work, there are equally innumerable instances where the intelligence agencies had failed to anticipate and prevent breaches of national security. It is an unfortunate fact of life that the public would always judge the intelligence agencies by their failures, which are public knowledge, rather than by their successes of which it has limited or no knowledge. .

While submitting his report, Justice Verma had suggested that the intelligence agencies should do an off-the-record introspection as to why they had failed to prevent the assassination of Rajiv. He apparently felt that there might be instances of commission and omission which they might not have shared with him, and wanted that they should at least meet and ruminate over them among themselves in order to draw lessons for the future. One introspection session was held under the leadership of the IB for about three hours, but nobody was prepared to concede that there was anything wrong with them. They held the introspection session not because they themselves, in a fit of remorse over their failure to prevent Rajiv's assassination, felt the need for it, but because Justice Verma had recommended it. It was a *nam-ke-vaste* introspection without any soul-searching.

INADEQUATE INTELLIGENCE

Kargil

In public mind, there is an unfortunate perception that the Kargil conflict of 1999 was a case of intelligence failure by the R&AW. It was not. A careful reading of even the report of the KRC would show that nowhere has it alleged an intelligence failure

or even used that expression. But it has drawn attention to serious deficiencies at various levels in the intelligence and operational process. Without going into the reasons for these deficiencies, it had suggested further enquiries by the Government into these deficiencies as a prelude to corrective action. Amongst the possible corrective measures, it had suggested that consideration be given to the creation of a Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and a separate agency for the collection of TECHINT, patterned after the USA's National Security Agency (NSA). The four Special Task Forces appointed by the Government in 2000 were as a sequel to the recommendations of the KRC.

Unfortunately, the intelligence agencies were unrepresented in the KRC. In other countries, whenever such multi-member commissions or committees are appointed to enquire into breaches of national security, a senior officer of the intelligence, serving or retired, is generally associated with it, so that he could draw attention to the professional aspects of the investigation.

The KRC has collated a summary of the various reports disseminated by the intelligence agencies prior to the conflict. A perusal of this collation would show that Kargil was not a case of zero secret intelligence, but one of inadequate intelligence and inadequate analysis and follow-up action even on the limited intelligence that was available .Over a period of nearly one year before the actual occupation of the Kargil heights by the Pakistani Security Forces, there were reports indicating heightened activity and stepped-up movements in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, consisting of Gilgit and Baltistan. The IB as well as the R&AW had drawn attention to these activities and expressed concern over the possibility of Pakistan planning cross Line of Control (LOC)/border terrorist action in this area. There was a fairly comprehensive assessment by the IB in this regard and less comprehensive reporting by the R&AW.

These reports did not, however, specifically indicate that the Pakistani Army was planning military action in this sector after the winter by occupying the heights during the winter. The occupation of the heights during the winter months remained undetected by the intelligence agencies, either through HUMINT or TECHINT,

and would appear to have been detected accidentally only after the winter. The answers to the following are still not clear :-

(a) Did the IB and the R&AW launch fresh trans-border operations to get more details of the military and para-military activities in the Northern Areas?

(b) The reports of both the IB and the R&AW, which were of a tactical nature, did not contain any intelligence of a strategic nature relating to the intentions and plans of the Pakistani Armed Forces. While the IB and the DGMI have no responsibility for the collection of strategic intelligence, it is the exclusive responsibility of the R&AW. The absence of intelligence of a strategic nature in the months preceding the Kargil conflict indicated a weak HUMINT capability of the R&AW? Was this addressed?

(c) The Aviation Research Centre (ARC) produced excellent aerial intelligence after the occupation was detected. This has been acknowledged by the KRC in its report. The Special Task Force on the Intelligence Apparatus noticed that our Army and the Air Force chiefs had also written letters of appreciation to the head of the R&AW on the ARC's valuable contribution during the conflict. Why was the ARC not utilised for similar aerial surveillance before the conflict broke out, particularly after the trans-border sources of the IB and the R&AW reported about heightened activity in the Northern Areas?

(d) The R&AW had produced excellent TECHINT during the conflict. Special mention needs to be made in this regard of the interception of the telephone conversations of General Pervez Musharraf, who had gone to Beijing, with the then Lieutenant General Mohammad Aziz Khan, his then Chief of the General Staff (CGS). Why was there no similar TECHINT windfall before the conflict broke out?

(e) The R&AW had always been strong in the collection of TECHINT through satellite monitoring and wireless interception, but weak in the monitoring of land-line phones inside Pakistan.

One gets the impression that this weakness, which has been there for years, has continued. Were steps taken to address this?

(f) Why did not the IB or the R&AW or both call for an urgent assessment of the reports disseminated by them to the JIC, with recommendations for follow-up action?

(g) Why did not the Army ask for an urgent assessment by the JIC as to whether it would be advisable for it to withdraw its forces from the Kargil heights during the winter of 1998-99 in view of the intelligence reports of increased activity in the Northern Areas?

(h) During a major part of this period, the head of the R&AW was holding additional charge as the Chairman of the JIC due to the Government's delay in selecting a permanent incumbent to the post. Did this have any impact on the attention paid by the JIC to the reports from the IB and the R&AW? As already mentioned in the months preceding the war over Falkland Islands, an officer of the British Foreign Office was also functioning as the Chairman of the JIC. The enquiry had led to the conclusion that the sense of complacency in the Foreign Office on Argentine intentions led to a lack of urgency in analysing the available open intelligence in the JIC. Was there a similar syndrome in our JIC?

Unless clear-cut answers to these questions are available, it would be difficult to draw the right lessons from the Kargil experience and prevent a recurrence of similar deficiencies in future. All one can say at present is that a "chaltha hai" (it is all right) attitude prevailed right across the national security management system in the months preceding the Kargil conflict and the political leadership was living in a make-believe world of its own imagining the Pakistani leadership to be well-intentioned and this played a no small role in our being taken by surprise.

11 September 2001 Terrorist Strikes in the US

Another recent example of a serious breach of national security due to inadequate intelligence, inadequate analysis,

assessment and follow-up action relates to the 11 September 2001 terrorist strikes by Al Qaeda in the USA. The relevant Congressional committees have already enquired into this and submitted their reports last year. Edited versions of their report have been released to the public. A bipartisan National Commission is presently holding another enquiry with well-publicised testimonies by important dramatis personae such as Richard Clarke, who was the co-ordinator of counter-terrorism in the National Security Council Secretariat, and Dr Condoleeza Rice, the National Security Adviser.

Amongst the intelligence reports available before 11 September 2001 to those responsible for follow-up action were the following :-

(a) A number of Arabs with no flying background or aspirations were undergoing flying training in wide-bodied aircraft in the US schools. It has been reported that a woman field officer of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had drawn the specific attention of the FBI headquarters to this and expressed her concern as to why they were doing so. No action on this was allegedly taken in the FBI and her note was not even put up to the Director.

(b) Al Qaeda had set up secret cells in the US and was wanting to carry out a major terrorist strike in the US territory. Its planned strike may involve the hijacking of aircraft.

On 6 August 2001, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had submitted to President Bush a briefing paper marked "For the President Only—Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US." This has been declassified in the beginning of April 2004 by the White House under pressure from the National Commission. A point under examination by the National Commission is why didn't the President and his National Security Adviser act on this report? If they had, would 11 September 2001 have been prevented?

Bush as well as Rice have dismissed the value of this report as only giving a historical account of the plans and activities of Al Qaeda without giving any precise intelligence about the likelihood of 11 September 2001. Bush has been quoted as saying: "If only

I had known that Al Qaeda was planning to hijack planes and crash them against the World Trade Centre towers, I would have moved heaven and earth to prevent this."

This is the problem intelligence agencies face all over the world. The political leadership and the policy-makers at the bureaucratic level always try to transfer the blame to the intelligence agencies without accepting their responsibility for inaction even when intelligence of a possible threat is available. While it is desirable and expected that the intelligence agencies would give precise and complete intelligence indicating the when, how and where of an anticipated threat, it is not always possible.

If the intelligence agencies are always able to collect such precise and complete intelligence, there would be no wars, no acts of terrorism and no failures of national security in the world. The fact that wars and acts of terrorism continue to take place show that the intelligence agencies do face difficulties, very often, in collecting precise and comprehensive intelligence, due to reasons beyond their control.

Intelligence failures have been right through history and failures there will be. No intelligence agency in the world, whatever be its human and material resources and its technical and technological capability, can claim or hope to be all-knowing. Intelligence agencies were never all-knowing even in respect of conventional state adversaries. They cannot be expected to be all-knowing in respect of their unconventional non-state adversaries.

The resulting gap has to be made good by better analysis and utilisation of the available intelligence, however, sparse it may be, better co-ordination amongst different agencies of the intelligence community and better physical security . Many breaches of national security occurred in the past and continue to occur today, not for want of intelligence, but due to poor analysis of the available intelligence and inadequate follow-up action on it and co-ordination.

The still on-going enquiries in the US have already highlighted the weak analytical capability of the US intelligence and law-enforcement agencies in the field of counter-terrorism, their lethargic

follow-up action and their persisting habit of keeping each other in the dark about what they knew and their anxieties. Such deficiencies are not something unique to the US. They are there in all countries of the world, including India, and the terrorists notice and take advantage of them.

A careful perusal of the declassified briefing paper of the CIA glaringly illustrates a serious deficiency in the US analysis and assessment system. What the CIA has described as a briefing paper is what in India we call a collation sheet. It collates the various reports in the CIA's possession—from open sources, its own sources and from foreign intelligence agencies. There is no attempt on its part to give its over-all assessment of the security implications of these reports and recommendations for action by the National Security Council and the President. One would have expected it to recommend an immediate review of the physical security arrangements in order to prevent Al Qaeda from carrying out its plans. No such recommendation would appear to have been made.

There is an unfortunate tendency in many intelligence agencies, including in India, to think that their job is over once they had collected intelligence and passed it on to the policy-making bureaucracy and the political leadership and that it is for them to ensure that their reports are discussed at high levels and necessary follow-up action is taken. It is equally the important responsibility of an intelligence agency to prod the bureaucracy and political leadership to act on their reports which indicate a serious threat to national security. Many intelligence officers avoid doing this.

INACCURATE INTELLIGENCE

One could cite three major instances of inaccurate intelligence. The first two relate to India and the third to the USA.

In 1968, the Naga insurgents established contact with China and started sending a number of gangs to Yunnan via the Kachin State of Myanmar for training and arms procurement. In 1969, the IB and the R&AW had jointly assessed that a total of 12 gangs with about 2100 members had managed to go to Yunnan. When

this assessment came up before the JIC for consideration, Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw (then a Lieutenant General in charge of the Eastern and the North-Eastern sector) and Brigadier MN Batra, the then DMI, appeared before the JIC and challenged the assessment of the two civilian agencies. They contended that not more than three or four Naga gangs with a total strength of not more than about 450, had gone to Yunnan.

When the JIC rejected their arguments and accepted the joint assessment, the Army refused to sign it and submitted a note of dissent incorporating the objections of Manekshaw. Later in 1969,those, who had gone to Yunnan for training, came back and many of them, including Mowu Angami, the chief of the Naga Army, were captured and interrogated in Delhi Cantonment by a joint interrogation team consisting of officers of the IB, the R&AW and the DMI. The interrogation team concluded that Manekshaw was right and the civilian agencies were wrong.

The over-stated assessment was, however, not deliberate. It was due to superficial examination of the source reports emanating from trans-border tribal sources. Many of them, while apparently referring to the movement of the same gangs across the Kachin State, had given different dates, different place names and different strengths. Each of these reports was mistakenly taken by the agencies as indicating the movement of a separate gang.

The second instance was about the R&AW's over-assessment in the 1980s of the number of Chinese troops stationed in Tibet. The then DMI repeatedly challenged this assessment, but his challenges were rejected by the R&AW and the JIC. It was subsequently found that the DMI was correct and the R&AW was wrong. The over-assessment arose due to the R&AW's poor HUMINT and TECHINT capability with regard to China, including in Tibet. As a result, it often relied for its assessments on reports from foreign intelligence agencies and from Tibetan political exiles, who had their own axe to grind and often misled the agency. The over-assessment was largely due to this over-dependence on reporting by political exiles, who are more often than not, very unreliable as sources.

The third instance relates to the various grossly inaccurate assessments made by the national security managers of the US with regard to Iraq's alleged possession of WMD and its alleged links with Al Qaeda, which have led to disastrous results. The reasons for these inaccurate assessments have already been discussed. These were partly the US agencies' over-dependence on anti-Saddam political exiles of dubious reliability and partly the politicisation of the analysis and assessment process by President Bush, his Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and their neo-conservative advisers in order to find excuses and pretexts for their pre-determined decision to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam.

OVERLOAD OF INTELLIGENCE

Overload of intelligence was already a major problem in the 1960s and the 1970s when the intelligence agencies did not have the kind of resources and technical gadgetry that they have today. The various disclosures in the US relating to the Vietnam war had brought out how a large volume of reports received by the CIA headquarters from their field stations in South-East Asia had remained unread and unanalysed . Anything, which was considered secret, was being collected and passed on to the headquarters, irrespective of whether they had any value for safeguarding national security or not.

As the means of collecting TECHINT improved by leaps and bounds, there was a similar overload of intercepts of various kinds. After the Soviet officials had shot down with a missile a South Korean commercial passenger plane in 1983 mistaking it for a US spy aircraft, it was reportedly found that a monitoring station of the USA's National Security Agency had intercepted conversations in the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), which had indicated that the Soviets had mistaken a commercial plane for a spy aircraft and were about to shoot it down. Had the messages been seen when they were intercepted, the US could have averted the tragedy by alerting the Soviets that it was a commercial passenger aircraft, but the US analysts reportedly saw those messages long after the tragedy.

The number of messages intercepted by today's equipment is dozens of times more than the intercepts of the 1980s and the

1990s. When intelligence analysts are confronted with such an avalanche of reports, mental and analysis fatigue sets in and the important and the vital are often missed.

No effective solution to this problem has so far been found by any agency in the world. Among the measures tried are emphasis on qualitative rather than quantitative reporting and on relevance to national security as an important requirement in reporting. The research and development of Information Technology (IT) software which could help in eliminating the trivial and identifying the important for examination by the analysts is also being done. Despite all these measures, overload continues to be a problem.

THE STATE OF INDIAN INTELLIGENCE

The Indian intelligence has had its moments of greatness and its moments of failure.

The role of the Indian intelligence during and before the 1971 war which led to the creation of Bangladesh and in bringing about a political solution to the insurgency in Mizoram and in detecting Pakistan's nuclear plans and systematically monitoring its development of a military nuclear capability since 1977 deserve to be written in letters of gold.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that but for the IB and the R&AW and but for the late BN Mullick, the former Director of the IB, RN Kao, the founding father of the R&AW, Shri Sankaran Nair, former head of the R&AW, Brigadier IS Hasanwalia (Retd) and innumerable other officers, there would have been no parting of the ways between the then West and East Pakistan.

The role of the Indian intelligence in contributing to successful counter-terrorism operations in the Punjab and other places has remained unknown.

And, yet, major failures there have been such as those relating to the Sino-Indian war of 1962, Rajiv's assassination in 1991, the Mumbai blasts of 1993, the Coimbatore blasts of 1998 and the hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane from Kathmandu to Kandahar in 1999.

The history of the Indian intelligence is also replete with perceived or proved inadequacies such as those relating to the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 and the Kargil conflict of 1999.

Is the Indian intelligence capability adequate to our needs? Does India have the intelligence community it needs and deserves as an emerging power? A knowledgeable and critical evaluation of the performance of the Indian agencies is rendered difficult, by the lack of adequate information about them and their functioning, the lack of transparency, the lack of debate about their performance in the Parliament and the lack of a strategic approach in determining our short, medium and long term needs in respect of intelligence collection and analysis capability. Unfortunately, the Indian political leadership and policy-making bureaucracy have only a limited understanding and vision of the role of intelligence capability as an important component of state power.

After the publication of the KRC report, Shri Kao, who felt disturbed by what he thought was the lack of depth and objectivity in its enquiries, conclusions and recommendations, wrote a personal letter to the then Prime Minister (PM) expressing his misgivings and anxieties. The PM was gracious enough to send for him for a detailed discussion. As he was taking leave of the PM after the discussions, Mr Kao told him, "Mr Prime Minister, the IB and the R&AW are two swords which you have in your hands to ensure India's strength and stability as a major power. Please do take good care of them. Don't let them get rusted."

In the US, practically every administration orders a comprehensive review of the state of the intelligence, even where there are no major failures. In India, we have had only limited enquiries when there were failures or breaches of national security. Since independence, there has not been a single comprehensive review of the state of Indian intelligence.

The Special Task Force on the Revamping of the Intelligence Apparatus set up in 2000 as a follow-up to the KRC report had very restricted terms of reference focusing essentially on how to remove the deficiencies pointed out by the KRC. It recommended the creation of the DIA, a multi-agency counter-terrorism centre

under the leadership of the IB, and measures for the strengthening of our TECHINT capability, but most of these recommendations related to Pakistan.

It was essentially a Pakistan-centric Task Force though it did make important recommendations in other fields too such as economic intelligence, cyber intelligence etc. But many other important areas such as our intelligence capability vis-à-vis China and other countries of the region, our TECHINT capability in the light of Pakistan's acquisition of military nuclear and missile delivery capabilities and so on remained unexamined and untouched in the recommendations.

One does not know how satisfactory has been the follow-up action even on the limited recommendations made. The ideas of a parliamentary oversight committee, written charters for the agencies, external evaluation of their performance etc, which are now accepted norms in an increasing number of foreign countries, are yet to find acceptance in India . The reluctance to accept these ideas has not always been from the agencies, as it is presumed by the public.

In some cases, the reluctance has been from the political leadership as in the case of the suggestion for parliamentary oversight. As regards written charters for the agencies, the R&AW was the only agency to ask for it. The post-Emergency LP Singh Committee, which had gone into the working of the IB and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) during the Emergency, had not only strongly recommended written charters for these two organisations, but also prepared the charters itself for approval and adoption by the Government. Its recommendations remained unimplemented till 2000. The Special Task Force has again made certain important recommendations in this regard, but one does not know their fate. There is a crying need for two steps by the Government as under :-

(a) A comprehensive review of the totality of the Indian intelligence capability and measures for strengthening it.

(b) The appointment of a National Intelligence Adviser to oversee the functioning of the entire intelligence community.

Lack of coordination not only between the civilian and military intelligence, but also between the civilian agencies themselves has been the bane of the Indian intelligence as it has been of the intelligence communities in other countries too, including the USA. This is not something which can be set right by the recommendations of a high-powered body alone, however high-powered it may be. It can be set right only through a realisation by all intelligence officers and agencies, whether civilian or military, internal or external, that they are all working for a common national cause and that national interests demand that they work together, without personal or institutional egos. Such realisation is nowhere to be seen.

RECENT USI PUBLICATIONS

1. Emerging Modes of Conflict and Asymmetrical Challenges to India's National Security
by Brigadier RK Bhonsle, SM
(New Delhi : Knowledge World, 2004) — Rs 650.00

2. USI National Security Series 2003
(New Delhi : Knowledge World, 2004) — Rs 550.00

3. Joint USI-CACDA (China Arms Control and Disarmament Association) Seminar (S-30) on The New US Strategy and Implications of Iraq War on Arms Control and the United Nations — Rs. 100.00

4. Joint USI-Executive Committee (Peace in Asia), Japan Seminar (S-31) on Regional Security Perspective, National Missile Defence (NMD), Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) Systems and Future of International System — Rs. 100.00