

Role of Military in Nation Building
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A nation is akin to a living organism. In order to progress and prosper, it has to grow in a balanced manner with the right mix of resources allocated for its growth on one hand and security on the other. Growth without security would leave a nation exposed to threats from its competitors. Conversely, excessive emphasis on security is likely to limit resource availability for growth. Let us examine this issue in a little more detail.

The rationale for existence of the military lies in the concept of a nation state. In a turbulent world such as ours, the need to grow in a stable and peaceful environment demands the necessity of a force which would ensure its national security against both internal and external challenges. Thus, almost all nations of the world have created their own militaries to perpetuate their existence. This has been the traditional justification for creation of militaries.

We are also aware that while investment carried out in all other fields provides tangible benefits in terms of returns and growth, benefits of funds spent on creation and maintenance of military are intangible and cannot be quantified. This provides grist to protagonists of growth in a 'guns versus butter' debate specially in developing economies where resources are invariably scarce. As a result, most nations end up allocating less than what is desired for defence, thereby jeopardising national security in the long run.

Thus, there is always a dilemma in deciding how much is enough as expenditure on a nation's military. A related aspect is that the expenditure on military is in direct proportion to the resource creation capability of a nation. Thus, stronger economies like the US and China can and do spend much more on their militaries than most European economies which are constrained by resources. Conversely, the moment a nation spends excessively on military by neglecting other sectors of growth; it becomes vulnerable to a break up thus endangering its national security. We have the recent example of the Soviet Union which built up a massive military industrial complex at the expense of a balanced growth, resulting in its break up finally. Even Pakistan, whose expenditure on military has been disproportionately high for years, is close to becoming a failed state for sheer neglect of other sectors. North Korea, possessing a massive stockpile of weapons, is faring no better and has problems sustaining its existence.

It needs to be appreciated that the expenditure on military is an ongoing exercise. To postpone expenditure today in the expectation that it would be made up subsequently is a policy riddled with serious consequences. It leads to loss of opportunity costs and accumulation of a deficit which is never possible to be made up due to invariable scarcity of resources. Our typical tendency to react only when a crisis is upon us rather than taking timely steps to avert it has landed us in dire straits in the past and would continue to do so in the future unless we become alive to this reality. Development of defence infrastructure on either side of the long Sino-Indian border is a clear example of the effect of regular versus sporadic spending. On the Chinese side, the infrastructure that has been developed is excellent, enabling China to launch and sustain large scale operations in a rapid time frame. On the Indian side, we are still in the process of developing the infrastructure thus putting a major constraint on our military to respond effectively to any threats.

From the foregoing, some facts emerge clearly. Firstly, in this era of nation states, no nation can do without having its own military to protect its core interests and its territorial integrity. Even those who consider it a non growth oriented and non remunerative white elephant have to possess it to perpetuate their existence. Leaving their security to others exposes them to a sense of vulnerability and an inherent disadvantage on the international stage which comes to the fore in times of a crisis. The Japanese apprehension over the Chinese claim on Senkaku islands controlled by Japan is a clear example. Secondly, a delicate balance has to be maintained by every nation between resources it allocates to its military as compared to other sectors. A substantial shift in favour of either can be disastrous for a nation in the long run. Thirdly, in order to keep the military modern, ready and relevant, expenditure on the military has to be on a continuing and ongoing basis.

In case of India, let us look at how the military has helped in nation building since the time of its Independence. The British followed the path of least resistance by leaving the status of 600 odd princely states within the union ambiguous and unsettled while announcing India's Independence. It required the vision of Sardar Patel and the backing of the Indian military to persuade, cajole, threaten and where necessary, use military force to make these states accede to the Indian Union and turn the country into one cohesive whole. Once again it was the military on which the nation relied to bring in a semblance of order in the mayhem and massacres of hundreds of thousands that took place during mass scale migration of people in Punjab and Bengal post the announcement of the Radcliffe award on partition of the country.

The invasion of J&K by Pakistan aided, abetted and supported by razakars in 1947-48 was thwarted by the Indian military despite a last minute entry when the attackers were knocking at the gates of Srinagar. Similar attempts by Pakistan in 1965, 1971 and 1999 met with the same fate, thanks to the heroic efforts of the Indian military. In fact, ignominious dismemberment of Pakistan and surrender of 90,000-93,000 Pakistani officers and men in 1971 added a glorious chapter to the history of the Indian military and gave the Country something to be proud of. All these victories have been achieved by the military in service of the Nation through supreme sacrifices and at a tremendous cost to life and material itself.

Even against China, while the debacle of 1962 rankles, a realistic appraisal would reveal that reasons for the setback lay in unrealistic policies, poor higher defence management, inability to appreciate their military's capabilities and intentions by the political leadership and an incompetent military leadership. The valour and heroism of troops on the frontline despite adverse conditions, in service of the Nation, was exemplary. That many made the supreme sacrifice is a testimony to their devotion to duty for the country.

Insurgencies in different parts of the Country have been a regular feature since the time we became Independent in 1947. Separatism, communalism, sectarianism, naxalism and Left Wing Extremism have been raising their ugly heads from time to time, striking at the roots of the very unity of the Country. Externally abetted proxy wars

like the current one in J&K are a constant attempt to undermine the integrity of the Country. Despite heavy odds, it is the Indian military which has kept the concept of One India alive. In tackling these insurgencies and fighting proxy wars, it has suffered more casualties than it did during the entire Second World War. In fact, the Indian state has always used the military as an instrument of last resort when all other means have failed. It is to the credit of the military that it has invariably delivered in all difficult situations. Our countrymen recognise this contribution and therefore have tremendous respect and admiration for the military.

The strong point of the military is its disciplined and organised methodology of problem solving. During training, aspects like prior planning, physical fitness, team work, nation building and devotion to duty are emphasised to bring out the best in every individual in achieving the laid down objectives. This well trained manpower has been a major asset of the military. While its worth in times of a war is amply clear, it provides an equally important resource in times of peace for nation building. This resource has excelled in every field it has entered into, because of the ethos and culture of organised hard work that it has developed while being trained in the military. Thus, today it is not uncommon to find former military personnel not only managing security organisations but also occupying pivotal positions in all other fields of corporate management, both in the public and private sector. With more than 50000 retiring personnel joining the national mainstream every year at a relatively young age of around 40 years, this resource if properly harnessed, can make a significant contribution to nation building.

In the past, it has not been uncommon to find the Country coming to a stop due to a strike in some vital sector of the economy or the other. Trade unions in the railways, oil sector, transportation sector etc. have held the Nation hostage bringing the economy to a grinding halt. In all such emergencies, it is the military with its limited resources which has come forward to run the essential services and keep the wheels of economy moving.

As a nation grows, there is a corresponding increase in its stature and the influence it wields in regional and global affairs. But to sustain such a situation, a nation has to have a military which can not only protect and safeguard its interests but also further them in the long term. Today, India is in this typical situation where military has a positive role to play in projecting it on to the world stage. We are being wooed by both the US and its allies and China with both sides trying to align us with themselves. In such a situation, military diplomacy, which is an extension of diplomacy by other means, has a crucial role in furthering our national interests. Carrying out joint military training with important players in the arena sends out signals which are most keenly watched and interpreted by the others. While we are keen to stay non aligned and preserve our autonomous decision making capability, it should not stop us from assuming the mantle of leadership in protecting common regional interests. Drug trafficking, piracy, protection of global commons and disaster relief are areas wherein the smaller nations of the region are hoping that India will take the lead. In fact, they are surprised as to why India has not done so till now. As and when it decides to take on the responsibility, the military will have a decisive role to play in furthering national policies and interests.

Our contribution to UN peacekeeping operations has enhanced our image in the eyes of the world. In all the peacekeeping missions across the globe, our military has acquitted itself admirably, resulting in greater demand for Indian troops wherever trouble has erupted lately and the UN decides to send its troops. Indian forces are seen as firm, fair, just and balanced in their approach, thus enhancing the image of the Country. In fact, our praiseworthy contribution to peacekeeping operations has strengthened our case for a permanent seat in the Security Council.

Likewise, our active stance on piracy on high seas and our deployment of the military in Arabian Sea to check the same has earned us the admiration of many a smaller nations. In the process, it has also enabled us to protect our vital oil supplies from the Gulf region, which in turn keeps the engine of economic growth moving.

If India is to occupy its rightful place in the comity of the nations, it has to achieve all round growth in all sectors. Balance has also to be maintained between growth and security. Optimum growth is only possible when both external and internal challenges to stability are taken care of. This underlines the importance of a ready, modern and relevant military. A robust military is an asset not only in the field of security but other areas of nation building as well. Its disciplined and methodical approach to crisis resolution is admired by the countrymen, who tend to fall back on the military as an instrument of last resort. The culture and ethos of a secular, apolitical and efficient military devoted to the unity and integrity of the country acts as a shining example to all others, bedevilled by communalism, corruption and poor governance. The military is successfully able to project and protect a country's image far beyond its borders thus contributing effectively to nation building.

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