

CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence is invited on subjects which have been dealt in the Journal, or which are of general interest to the services.

The Editor,
U.S.I. Journal.

Dear Sir,

RE-ORGANISATION OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND ARMED FORCES HEADQUARTERS THEIR RELATIONSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES/AUTHORITY

I

WE cannot but congratulate Rear Admiral Venkateswaran and Wing Commander Gopalaswami, for tearing wide open in detail, the total contradiction, repetition and mill-stone that is today India's Defence Ministry. Beside the fact that it, in consultation with other ministries, was the cause of our debacle against China, when there was no need to have gone into confrontation with the country at all, General Kaul and Thapar were advising against the operation till the last moment, but the Ministry of Defence went ahead with ordering it, against Army advice.

This misadventure should have been a glaring and major mistake which should have been analysed, traced to source and its causes explained. But by hiding everything under the caption 'security' much has been swept under the carpet including the Henderson Brooks report. There is no field in which mankind has learnt more by failure than matters pertaining to war.

One thing has been clear about all the battles that India has fought; that is the ponderous machinery that brings troops to battle, leaving almost nothing to manoeuvre, flexibility, mobility or decisive action. Indeed, doing the unexpected is almost an unknown feat by our armed forces. All this stems from the 'Whitehall system' of handling files; duplication, moving files up and down and sideways, and query after query before anything at all is allowed to happen. After this Babble of opinions the decision is either too late or wrong. The

dead weight on top is daily becoming more oppressive destroying that jeweled virtue of a soldier "INITIATIVE".

However, the Admiral and the Wing Commander have in their essay bogged their minds down with irrelevant history which has no useful purpose to serve for a readiness for operations of the forces of India of today. It would have been enough for them to go back to World War II in which the use of Army, Navy and Air Forces, for the first in history, were used on a really major scale, truly combined in effort on a world wide and theater level.

We can still remember that it took Britain a long time to deploy its efforts, and America, while starting out in 1942 with broad, wide ranging operations, also became more and more tied down and even exhausted as the fires of war consumed her effort. It was fortunate for America that her productive capacity was left unhampered by Hitler. This cannot happen again, if America should be unlucky enough to go to war. But England had to switch much of its production effort to India and the dominions to cope at all with the Axis. Even then the strain left England impoverished at the end of the war. Are these the patterns to emulate?

What is surprising is that the Sailor and the Airman did not while writing their critique of our Defence Ministry look for a solution that could lead to real efficiency and self reliance by studying the only really successful methods of waging of war that threw back and destroyed Hitler's Hordes. That happened in the U.S.S.R. A most clear and well written book is the "Soviet General Staff at War" 1941-45 by General of the Army S.M. Shtemenko.

In the first chapter he criticize the critics who say that the U.S.S.R. was caught totally offguard. He says, "Did our country have the potential to fight a powerful enemy?" (That was at the start of the war). He replies "Yes it did. The U.S.S.R. had developed from a State of Backwardness into a genuinely powerful socialist country". That means an advanced country is better prepared for war then a backward one.

"Thanks to 5 year plans we had all the material and technical pre-requisites for defeating the enemy", and justifying his statement, he points out that in 1940 the U.S.S.R. produced 18 million tons of steel as compared to Germany's 19 million tons. The U.S.S.R. made 15 million tons of pig iron compared to Germany's 14 million. The Germans 68 million kwh of electricity was compared to the Soviet's 48 million kwh. U.S.S.R. had set up its own "oil extracting industry, machinery, aircraft, tractor and instrument making industries—Farming

was undergoing fundamental re-organization—and the Soviet system had extensive cultural achievements”.

All this must sound peculiar to the ears of our military “experts”; but that was the foundation of Soviet ability to wage war. He goes on and states what was being done to train “a regular army of many million strong”. In 1983 the U.S.S.R. produced 5,469 aircraft, in 1940, 10,826. While confessing that a number of mistakes were also made he says “These mistakes undoubtedly made our position difficult when we entered into war against Germany which had all the economic resources of most of Europe to draw on. Nevertheless Nazis immediately began to incur heavy losses and within six months—suffered crushing defeat at Moscow”.

We should ask ourselves what was the enabling organizational machinery which made this possible. They set up a general H.Q. of the High Command of the Armed Forces. With it was set up a board of permanent advisers to G.H.Q. Most of these had direct links with other national activities which were essential to support the war effort.

The way of command is also of interest. The book abounds with passages like this. “The General Staff ideas on the subject were sent to the Front’s military council as a tentative attempt to find the best solution”. When the Front sent its counter proposals he says that “it tended to dissipate the efforts of the troops particularly the cavalry corps and the tanks and involved a far too complicated manoeuvre”. So the General Staff reviewed the plans and again sent them to the Front with a general directive of their intentions. It may be noted that “Stalin always preferred reports from the actual scene of events”. Further “Army problems under consideration at G.H.Q. were discussed in a calm business like atmosphere. Everyone could state his opinion—For him (Stalin) there was only one form of address “Comrade Stalin”.

A study of the book shows the absolute integration of the Defence organization with all the supply, social, cultural, technical production and learning activities of the entire country. Such a thing is not possible without a proper services edifice integrated into a national whole. But as ‘Sun Tzu said 2500 years ago “war is an affair of state,—a matter of life and death”. Can we today play with it, can we have organizations based on traditions, on feelings for historical considerations that no longer exist? Of course, every one will say, no; but on what is the shape of India’s Ministry of defence based? Where is the close knit and direct relationship between the top and the bottom, the rear and the front? Must we go on depending on outside

Atlantic countries for organizational patterns and for know how? Must our concept not be based on our own needs, on our peoples capabilities and on the situations we are likely to face? While at one end we insist that we must (for misstated reasons) have the best of arms, on the other we control and direct them through the most archaic and suicidal organizations.

I notice the Admiral and the Airman have not faced the even more important error that we did make by abandoning a G.H.Q. and then going on to a triservice (totally out-moded) organization. The principal of Unity of command has always existed, from before Alexander to Stalin. Even though the U.S.S.R. changed its social order it organized its armed forces on this principle. To ensure proper work it went so far as to have Tank Armies, Artillery Armies, and Air Armies. They all have their Commanders-in-Chief; but the guiding controlling H.Q. is the Defence H.Q. manned by service men and commanded by one of them.

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II

Dear Sir,

THE authors in their effort to eliminate the dual control to which the service headquarters are subjected today, have given little importance to the fact that their suggestion leads to further degradation in the status of the services chiefs.

Let us pay more attention to the fact that it is the armed forces which have been entrusted with the responsibility of defending the frontiers of the country and thus :—

(a) Sufficient authority must be vested in the services chiefs or the chief of defence staff as suggested by the authors as would enable them to carry out their responsibility. This should include financial powers as well.

(b) The infrastructure such as defence research, Admin, supply etc. built to assist and indeginise the forces must remain subordinate to the defence headquarters simply because this infrastructure has been created for the defence forces and not vice versa.

There is no necessity to have an equivalent civ org/appt for every

Mil Org/Appt in the Min. of Def. I suggest the Def. Commission be the highest org to have civ reps. This commission should have the heads of various agencies as reps, a Mil offr of the rank of Lt Gen as a rep member of the joint chief of staff and the Def Minister as the chairman. The article has also raised two major issues as under which call for views of experts :—

(a) The principle of political control over the armed forces has to be abided by in our country. But does this mean that the def org be subjected to civil bureaucracy at a time when all over there is a cry from technocrats and educationists to act as direct advisors to the respective Ministry rather than be advisors to the civil bureaucracy.

(b) There is a need to upgrade the status and powers of the services chiefs keeping in view the status granted to them at the time of independence and that too much of power is currently concentrated with civil bureaucracy (IAS) and needs to be decentralised.

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