

The Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3): The Journey to its Quadranscentennial

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The United Service Institution (USI) of India — colloquially called

‘The USI’ — is probably the oldest think tank of India. It was established in 1870 by the British for furtherance of their aims in sustaining their Empire in South Asia. However, it did not have a separate ‘Research’ vertical for contemporary national security studies. It relied on the submission of papers of interest by its members, and has been publishing the USI Journal since its inception. It was understandable that, since the need of the British Empire was more to secure and defend its Crown Jewel — India, not much was done to train the native Indian minds on these aspects. Post India’s independence, while the same model was followed, a need was felt to have a ‘Research Wing’ in the USI. It was essential for the furtherance of interest and knowledge of national and military security not only amongst its members, but also within the Services, bureaucracy, scholars, and the polity at large.

The spade work for the same was done by the doyen of the USI, the first Secretary cum Editor post-independence, subsequently the first Director and Editor, Colonel Pyara Lal (Retd). It was pursued further by Major General Samir Sinha (Retd), who succeeded him. The aim was to provide a platform for interested members to undertake study and research on selected security related subjects. The Centre for Research, USI-CR, which celebrates its Quadranscentennial (Silver Jubilee) this year, was finally approved by the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) in November 1995, but the process was stalled, somewhat, by the need to focus on construction of the new premises (present

location) where the USI was to move from its then limited space in Kashmir House. The new building had the requisite provision of a dozen rooms to enable the setting up of work stations for research scholars under the USI-CR.

Once the USI moved in to its new premises, Lieutenant General Satish Nambiar (Retd), the next Director, was able to actualise the Research vertical. The then Service Chiefs, Admiral VS Shekhawat, General Shankar Roy Choudhury, and Air Chief Marshal SK Sarin, provided grants as corpus for instituting three Chairs of Excellence at the USI, appropriately named after the first Indian Chiefs of the three Services — Field Marshal KM Cariappa, Admiral Ram Dass Katari and Air Marshal Subroto Mukherjee. Subsequently the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) acceded to the request from the then Director USI, and provided a corpus respectively, for two more Chairs of Excellence — the DS Kothari Chair and the MEA Chair. Thus, the USI-CR, under the oversight of the Deputy Director & Editor (DDE), began functioning.

A few years later, to widen the area of research and related activities, the USI Council approved increasing the scope of activities of the USI-CR, its re-designation as the Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (USI- CS3), and instituting a new post of Deputy Director (Research), or the DDR, as its Head. The USI-CS3 was established on 01 January 2005. CS3 is managed by a Board of Management (BoM) appointed by the USI Council. In addition, the USI now started receiving servicing officers on one to two years' study leave as Senior Research Scholars, who conduct deep research on subjects related to national and military security as desired by the Service Headquarters. At the end of their study, USI publishes their research as a book, post its peer review, thus adding to the scholarly work of the institution and also meeting the requirement of Service Headquarters. An up-to-date data bank was also started being maintained.

The scope of CS3 was also enlarged to encompass military-oriented studies aimed at conducting comprehensive enquiry, research and analyses on national and international security

issues, military oriented strategic gaming and simulation to evolve options for wider discussion and considerations, and also undertake contractual studies outsourced by Net Assessment Directorate, HQ Integrated Defence Staff, National Security Council Secretariat, and the MEA. Two more Chairs of Excellence have been added to the five that were already established earlier. Colonel PS Gill, father of late Flying Officer Amandeep Gill, provided a corpus for a Chair in the memory of his son, in 2015; similarly, in February 2020, the USI and HQ Assam Rifles (AR) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) wherein the HQ AR provided a corpus for a Chair of Excellence, especially for studies relating to the North East. As on date, CS3 has a total of seven Chairs of Excellence. Till now, a total of 59 fellowships have been awarded to these Chairs of Excellence (including USI-CR); books, based on these researches, have been published in most cases.

Over these years, the CS3 has evolved as one of the leading research centres in India. In order to undertake its projects, the CS3 regularly engages the services of members of the USI who have specialised knowledge in various spheres. The CS3 also runs a blog and accepts written papers which it publishes digitally as 'Strategic Perspective' on the USI website. The CS3 also vets and organises peer reviews of longer research papers, published as Occasional Papers and Monographs.

CS3 has been regularly contracted by the National Defence College (NDC), New Delhi to conduct Strategy Gaming Exercises for officers of the NDC course. Such exercises are also being conducted for Higher Command Course at Army War College. Strategic and security capsules/lectures have also been regularly held at Naval War College, College of Air Warfare, Jindal Global University (now discontinued), and National Police Academy. CS3 has been conducting workshops for Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers, undergoing courses at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the MEA, and also Strategic Panel Discussions for foreign diplomats undergoing professional courses at the FSI. The expertise of the CS3 in this field is recognised, which is why in 2019 it was involved in a special Strategic Gaming Exercise on behalf of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for the QUAD

countries, the strategic grouping of India, Australia, Japan, and the USA. The DRDO has also utilised the expertise of the USI on tactical/operational orientation for its scientists, to assist them in grasping the military nuances that is necessary for making war gaming software at the tactical, operational and strategic levels. Higher Defence Management Course (HDMC) officers have also been visiting USI since 2000 for their project briefing, and Net Assessment courses have also been conducted for the Services. The CS3 has also been commissioned by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) to conduct a Jointmanship Training Capsule for the mid-level officers of the three Services.

Since 2009, the USI commenced conducting the annual International Security Seminar that attracts experts and scholars from all over the world. The proceedings of the seminar are then published as a book. Similarly, the USI has participated in all the editions of the Xiangshan Forum hosted by the PLA in China, the SCO Forum conferences in Tashkent, Moscow and Sochi, and the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. It has also been a part of the Track 1.5/Track 2.0 dialogue process, especially with Afghanistan, Vietnam, and Taiwan. Foreign delegations which visit the USI are conducted by the CS3, and their subject of interest is discussed with them. The MEA has also reached out to the USI for conduct of courses for key senior level officers, diplomats and bureaucrats of friendly foreign countries as part of its defence-diplomacy outreach.

The USI, through the CS3 vertical, has signed a number of MoUs with national and international institutions, media establishments and universities (both Indian and foreign) for furtherance of research and study. The USI has a very robust international engagement programme and its scholars and experts have participated in events with other think tanks in USA, EU, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea, Vietnam, Israel, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Sweden, Norway, Jordan etc.

It was felt that despite the books and monographs published by the researchers, there was a great reluctance on the part of thinkers and domain experts to articulate their perceptions on

strategic issues or help formulate long term strategic views. To contribute to the evolution and dissemination of strategic thought, it was decided during the tenure of Lieutenant General PK Singh (Retd), as Director, to bring out an annual 'Strategic Year Book' covering topical issues relating to geo-politics, geo-strategy, and national security. Major General BK Sharma (Retd), as the then DDR and Head CS3, took on this project and the first issue was published in the year 2016; since then, five annual issues have been published with each one having been received extremely well by the apex policy and decision makers.

The CS3 has come a long way since its journey started under Brigadier Vinod Sehgal (Retd). It then took wings under Major General YK Gera (Retd), former Head CS-3 and, thereafter, attained its prominence under the guidance of Major General BK Sharma (Retd), the previous Deputy Director Research and Head CS3 and present Director USI. The contribution of the Distinguished Fellows with the CS3, over this period, has also enabled it to reach such acme of excellence. In this journey, the CS3 has been ably served by Lieutenant General Chander Prakash (Retd), Lieutenant General GS Katoch (Retd), Major General PK Goswami (Retd), Major General Rajiv Narayanan (Retd), Major General RPS Bhadauria (Retd), Brigadier Narender Kumar (Retd), Major General Rajendra Kumar Yadav (Retd), Group Captain Sharad Tewari (Retd), Dr Roshan Khanijo, and Mr Gaurav Kumar.

USI and CS3 have met the challenge posed by the pandemic admirably by exploiting the digital world to connect with our members. A large number of Webinars have been conducted over the digital platforms Zoom and WebEx. USI has also partnered with other Indian and foreign think tanks in conducting such web discussions, like NIICE and AIDIA of Nepal, BIPSS Bangladesh, AISS of Afghanistan, RAND Corporation USA, ICWA India, CAPS Taiwan, and Hudson Institute USA. It has also partnered with media establishments for video recordings on Strategic Issues, like Strategic News Global (SNG) India of journalists Mr Nitin Gokhale, and Ms Gaurie Dwivedi. USI-CS3 is also active on social media notably Twitter, Face Book, and YouTube.

The eminent professor of leadership studies, Lee Bolman at Kansas University has said, “[a] vision without a strategy remains an illusion”. The CS3 will continue to provide strategic choices to policy and decision makers of India to enable them to fulfil our national vision.

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