

The Context

I stand here after 12 years when on the eve of the Army Day on 15 Dec 2004, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the then Defence Minister and I came here to announce the promulgation of the AV Singh Committee Report. For me, that was like a mission which ensured the dignity of officers by way of certainty of reaching a certain level of rank. 18000 officers were promoted in one day. The joke went that in the Gopinath Bazar they ran out of the epaulets for various ranks on that day!

I thank the USI for inviting me to speak from this very exalted platform which has seen very many distinguished persons before me speak on this particular subject or many other closely related topics.

Firstly, a word about the ‘Colonel Pyara Lal Memorial Talk’ itself. Colonel Pyara Lal is a venerated icon among our generation of professionals. He took over as the Secretary of this Institution (established by Colonel MacGregor in Shimla in 1870) four years after it moved into the Kashmir House in New Delhi, in 1957, and continued to nurture it during its still fledgling years for three decades, till 1987. Perhaps, he would have carried on longer had he not died in harness. It was his sheer dedication and perseverance that pulled the Institution through its most difficult days. Indeed, this talk is an apt homage to the memory of this visionary.

The subject of my talk is, “Role of Higher Defence Organisation in India’s Security Architecture”. Since the problems about this issue, by now, have been well established and also widely discussed, a lot of what I will say today perhaps would have been said before; may be in different forms. Therefore, in order to save time and not be repetitive on those issues, I would just draw your attention and not elaborate on the same. First, let us identify as to wherein lay the genesis of the deficiencies in our Higher Defence Organisation, or HDO in short.

Part I –Inherited HDO and Genesis of the Problems

Genesis of the Problem – Trust Deficit in the Army

The mistrust of the then Government was one major malice which has afflicted the Army right since our Independence. This has had an impact on our organisation and functioning all along. In 1947, India inherited a highly rated Army along with some components of Navy and Air Force. This force used to be headed by a Commander-in-Chief, who was the number two man in the pre-Independence hierarchy. The British governed India through civil service machinery headed by the Indian Civil Service (ICS) and the Imperial Police (IP), while for security, they banked upon the disciplined and thoroughly professional British Indian Army. Conditions, however, turned completely different after Independence. Having convinced themselves of having ‘won’ freedom through peaceful *Satyagraha* alone, most Indian leaders, in their misplaced idealism, subscribed to such notions as ‘peace loving India will not be at war ever’, and ‘there would be no requirement for an army’, least of all, what they still considered to be the British Indian Army.

That unfortunate politico-military discomfort solidified into innate mistrust when in the 1950’s, one after the other, newly independent countries in the neighbourhood turned into military dictatorships. Bureaucrats, on whom the politicians could not but be dependent for any and all of their aspirations, found an opportunity to grab unquestioned and unaccountable control over a very upright military. As to how fallacious these notions were, is borne out by the fact that India has fought as many as five wars since Independence and has been engaged in near-continuous insurgency-cum-proxy war since 1960’s. Indeed, credit for the success of our forces, except for the humbling experience of 1962, goes to the wisdom of our then senior commanders, duly backed by sound generalship, bravery of our young leaders and soldiers, and their excellent operational execution. Nevertheless, this trust deficit obviously impacted the HDO very adversely.

Along with the element of mistrust, another factor, which has hurt us historically, and that still persists, is the “lack of strategic culture in India”.

Lack of Strategic Culture

Strategic culture is generally defined as a “set of beliefs, attitudes and norms towards the use of military force, often moulded according to historical experience” (Chappell 2009). It “includes national traditions, habits, values, attitudes, ways of behaviour, symbols, approaches and special processes chosen to influence external environment and the ways of solution of problems face to face to threats or to using of force” (Ken Booth 1991).

It is needless to emphasise that the lack of strategic culture has been a bane of our history. Formal recognition of this debility in the Indian political understanding came in the early 1990’s from George Tanham, which has now been further alluded to by the old India hand, Stephen Cohen. Our leadership at the time of Independence and even thereafter has carried no experience of warfare at all, unlike the Americans and the European countries. As it becomes starkly apparent from the developments post-Independence, this inexperience, exacerbated by very poor level of professional-expert consultation, manifests in the absence of strategic culture. What could be more glaring example of this weakness than such unwise beliefs as ‘we are a peaceful nation, we do not need an army, police is enough’, or words to that effect by our first Prime Minister?

That strategic disorientation was thus manifested by the premature termination of the 1947-49 War in Kashmir, adoption of ‘forward policy’ prior to 1962 under the influence of wayward intelligence and diplomatic assessments – and to the complete dismissal of the warnings of the military leadership – in the run up to the 1962 debacle. Subsequently, strategic myopia was also demonstrated by the return of Haji Pir Pass after 1965 War and 93000 prisoners of war after 1971 War, both without any reciprocal gains, and finally, the 10 month long meaningless deployment in Operation Parakram in 2001-02. But what annotates the Indian political leadership’s strategic naïveté most is the strange fact that they have unwittingly allowed the nation’s HDO to pass under the proxy control of a generalist bureaucracy, while military professionals remain banished from the process of substantial decision making - unless ‘invited’ to express their opinion. One wonders if this has been a well-considered option adopted by the political leadership!

Is it not pitiable that even though India maintains the world’s third largest military, we still neither have a ‘National Security Doctrine’ nor a ‘National Security Strategy’ and an institutionalised mechanism to assess the dynamics of our security challenges!

The Inherited HDO

As the British left, at Pandit Nehru’s instance, Lord Ismay, the Viceroy’s Chief of Staff, devised a mechanism for higher defence management in Independent India. That mechanism or the HDO consisted of three elements of defence policy making. At the political decision making level, there was the ‘Defence Committee of the Cabinet’ – the fore bearer of the present Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). Then came the ‘Defence Minister’s Committee’ with Service Chiefs and Defence Secretary as its members to attend to policy issues at the ministry level. The third element was a purely professional body meant to render military advice and implement or execute the political directions. Thus, there was a Tri-Service ‘Chiefs of Staff’s Committee’ to guide the conduct of inter-services matters while intra-service control was exercised by the three Service Chiefs. Integrated approach to defence management was promoted through the committees for ‘Joint Intelligence’, ‘Joint Planning’, ‘Joint Training’ and ‘Common Logistics’ etc. Catering to the defence-dedicated public and private sectors, there was the ‘Defence Coordination and Implementation Committee’ chaired by the Defence Secretary to synergise defence research, development, finance, production and acquisitions. Notable aspects of the arrangement were:-

(a) Firstly, Service Chiefs were formal members of a duly constituted ‘Defence Minister’s Committee’ and other Joint Committees. To that extent, other departments of the Ministry of Defence – viz, Defence Production, Research and Development, Defence Estates, Ex-Servicemen Welfare, Finance etc. – had to be more responsive to the Service Headquarters’ voice over defence matters, as compared to this day. In the present set up, discontinuation of such an institutionalised forum and subsequent bifurcation of the Department of Defence Production from the Department of Defence has diluted that degree of influence.

(b) Secondly, in strategic matters and higher defence policy making, the military leadership had no formal decision making authority. That authority was kept as a sole preserve of the politico-bureaucracy combine, while only the responsibility for execution of the decisions was assigned to the Defence Forces.

(c) Thirdly, an important issue to note here is that the HDO was created when India had no inkling of the humongous security challenges which would crop up subsequently in an unending succession, thereby rendering it unsuitable for our present day requirements.

This was the system in operation when Kashmir was rescued from Pakistan’s aggression in 1947-48. However, during the 1950’s, an era of peace-rhetoric gained ground among the Indian political leadership and the salience of higher defence management got gradually further diluted. While the Service Headquarters were formally assigned the status of ‘Attached Offices’, thereby virtually disfranchising the military leadership from apex policy-making process, the Committees ceased, more or less, to function. The situation was not helped by a politically obsessed and manipulative Defence Minister.

Functional procedures of the HDO were somewhat corrected after the 1962 debacle but they still remained unsatisfactory. Even then, over the next 25 years, better management of the military resulted in the success gained – in 1965 and 1971 Wars, continuous internal insurgencies, regional interventions in Sri Lanka and Maldives, and above all, nearly three decades of effective deterrence against Pakistan’s and China’s aggressiveness. However, lessons of the Kargil conflict, when put through the microscopic scrutiny, pointed at grave deficiencies in our HDO, and it is a pity that the corrective measures have been implemented only selectively.

Part II – India’s Present HDO and Its Inadequacies

Present HDO

India’s present HDO is still emerging as a result of the ‘Post-Kargil War’ restructuring of the defence establishment. The Kargil Review Committee was followed by a ‘Group of Ministers’ (GOM) headed by then Deputy Prime Minister, Shri LK Advani. It had four Task Forces, which made far-reaching recommendations through their report titled ‘Reforming the National Security System’. A decade later, the Government convened another ‘Task Force on National Security Reforms’ referred to as the ‘Naresh Chandra Committee’ to suggest course corrections in respect of some leftover issues of GOM’s decisions. Besides some others, these mainly were the appointment of CDS and integration of the Defence Ministry. The CDS, when in whatever form it is instituted, would bring in the most desired internal jointness amongst the Services and also provide ‘single point military advice’ to the Government. These matters occupy the centre stage of all current strategic issues and discussions, and would be touched upon again in the later part of my talk.

Defence Structure

The CCS is a constitutionally empowered apex decision making authority which has the task of outlining the mandate for the military to organise itself, allocating resources for that purpose and dealing with various security challenges from time to time. The Committee has the counsel of professionals who are competent in nuances of national security, though strangely, the Service Chiefs are ‘invited’ for the meetings – only on as required basis, and that rests at the discretion of the Government. Thus the CCS does not have any constant institutionalised professional military advice.

Next, to provide the necessary staff support to the polity, there is a formally constituted body referred to as the ‘National Security Council (NSC), with a ‘National Security Advisor’ (NSA) and the consultative bodies in the form of the ‘National Security Advisory Board’ (NSAB) and the ‘Strategy Policy Group’ (SPG) (not constituted for the last two years). The NSC also has a secretariat headed by Deputy NSA to support it.

Furthermore, the national level intelligence work is attended to by the ‘Intelligence Coordinating Group’, which is responsible for tasking and coordination among various intelligence agencies like the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) and Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), and further assisted by the Technical Coordination Group (TCG) and the National Information Board (NIB). They all report to the NSA.

Management of Nuclear Force

The nuclear force is organised under the overall control of a ‘National Command Authority’ (NCA) which has its stand-by or alternate set-ups, and is supported by its dedicated ‘Strategy Programme Staff’ (SPS). The NCA is made up of a ‘Political Council’ under the Prime Minister (composed as the CCS) and an ‘Executive Council’ to operate the intended nuclear posture. The Executive Council is headed by the NSA and has Service Chiefs, Commander-in-Chief of Strategic Forces Command (SFC) and the heads of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) as its members.

Organisation of the Executive Council is, therefore, reasonably well taken care of – except for the stark misbalance of not having any dedicated institutionalised military representation by way of CDS, who is supposed to assist the NSA. In his absence, the Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee, who is not a permanent head and is frequently changing, represents the Services.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD)

At the next level, the MoD is responsible to facilitate the military in finding a right balance of organisational architecture, force-composition, equipment profile and professionally trained and motivated personnel. Similarly, it guides the rest of the defence sector to be truly responsive to the requirements of the military forces. Needless to state, formal and lead participation of military professionals in these functions of the MoD should be mandatory, but that is missing.

Actually, the Raksha Mantri (RM) attends to his responsibilities predominantly through a bureaucracy of generalists and also occasionally through professional military advice. However, under the present dispensation, the military is mostly absent from the policy and decision making process. This absence of formal military participation at the policy-making level further adds to sub-optimal harnessing of the nation’s intelligence assets and processing of strategic information at the MoD level. In other words, matters of national defence at the ministerial level are being attended to in an unstructured manner, in which professional military participation is neither sanctified nor considered mandatory.

Inadequacies of Our HDO

From the foregoing, inadequacies in India’s HDO are quite apparent. There is the imbalance in professional interface between the MoD and the military leadership, wherein the Ministry comes to wield far more authority beyond its actual mandate. Civil servants, instead of just assisting the Minister in finalisation and implementation of policy issues, for the defence forces to discharge their responsibilities, end up taking decisions which are best left to the military professionals’ domain. Even if the Services Headquarters were to be ‘integrated’ into the MoD as a follow up of the Kargil Committee Report, on ground, the archaic ‘Allocation of Business’ (AOB) and ‘Transaction of Business’ (TBR) Rules continue to jar the functioning of the entire defence set up. The best example is that the real authority continues to be at the hands of a bureaucracy which is not competent to wield it. Also, the facts that the ‘RM’s Monday Morning Meetings’ continue to be mundane and the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) remains headless ever since its inception, are some of the major gaps. To cap it all, the Chiefs’ traditional access to the Prime Minister has practically become a notional event. These, therefore, are some of the examples of the inadequacies of the present HDO.

The result is that the MoD, at its best, performs merely as a post office to attend to the staff work associated with projections made by the Services on various capital, revenue and personnel management schemes. In so doing, more often than not, the MoD is using the process of scrutiny to deflect or dilute professionally adjudged projections. Furthermore, Services continue to generally remain out of the decision making loop, wherein even the Service Chiefs’ decisions and recommendations are put to scrutiny from Desk Officers’ level upwards. *There are many versions of who conveyed the decision of the Government of India to the Chiefs to ‘throw out’ the Chinese across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in 1962; with some saying it was a desk officer while others claiming it was a Joint Secretary. Who exactly conveyed the Government’s order is of lesser consequence, what is more important is that, a decision of such magnitude should have been first discussed and then conveyed to the Chiefs at the very apex level.*

The situation is further exacerbated by lack of inter-services jointness on matters of force-structuring, modernisation and acquisitions – all due to our faulty organisational structure. Indeed, non-institution of CDS, true integration of the MoD, absence of a National Security Doctrine and National Security Strategy, growth of ‘hollowness’ in our military capabilities, and lacklustre approach to the establishment of the National Defence University (NDU) etc., all are manifestations of these inadequacies. As to whether it should be a CDS or a “Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee”, that could be in accordance with the wisdom of the Government, but the non-existence of this appointment has become a major drawback. *Most advanced countries in the world which maintain reasonably sized defence forces, have instituted this appointment already (28 in number); India remains an odd exception.*

Finally, for the MoD, being bereft of due operational competency, and yet to be sitting in judgement over professionally articulated proposals behind the garb of so called efforts at ‘cost saving’, is a most counter-productive practice. The net effect is that the civil-military interface in the MoD is reduced to combative mentality among the both. Truly, when the civil- military relations are being termed as ‘strained’, these are really the cause as well as manifestation of faulty organisational structures.

Appropriately, therefore, the first step of defence reforms would be to invigorate the current HDO and introduce the corrective measures, which in turn would facilitate inter-services jointness, desired modernisation and astute fiscal planning to address the challenges of national security. Let us now see, in brief, as to what is the magnitude of these challenges that India faces.

Part III –Strategic Challenges Confronting India and Complexities of Future Wars

India’s Strategic Challenges

Western Borders. Security challenges faced by India are enormous. Along our Western borders, we have Pakistan, who is a constant source of threat and have now introduced the element of use of Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) as weapons of war. They also have a sizable number of strategic assets, which perhaps match or exceed that of India. Pakistan has also taken recourse to brazen terrorism for over a quarter of a century. They are mixing it with *Wahhabi* radicalisation and are executing it under the cover of ‘nuclear blackmail’. It never tires of holding out the threat that any response by India, as reaction to its acts of terrorism, will be countered by the use of the TNWs. Our deterrence is thus under question.

Northern, Northeastern and Eastern Borders. Along our northern and eastern peripheries, we have unsettled borders with China and these can always be a source of conflict. Even the Indo-Bangladesh border remaining peaceful or otherwise in future would depend on the Government in power in Bangladesh and its ideological inclinations.

The Indian Ocean. China’s presence in the Indian Ocean is becoming more and more prominent by the day. The Chinese already have a ‘string of pearls’ around India, besides the ready availability of Pakistan ports of Karachi, Ormara and Gwadar. Besides these, they are creating connectivity with strategic connotations through the ‘China-Pakistan Economic Corridor’ (CPEC). Lastly, they are also setting up their infrastructure in Djibouti to further ensure the safety of the movement of their energy resources.

Which country in the world faces so many varied forms of challenges, both along their land and oceanic frontiers, as India does? Definitely, none. These challenges get further accentuated when seen in the light of the rapidly changing nature of war. Are we, with our rather modest levels of fiscal budget and defence preparedness, ready to face those kinds of wars?

Complexities of Future Wars

While future wars would be characterised by intense cyber and space operations, command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, information, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4I2SR) operations in the domain of net-centricity and information warfare, besides the debilitating use of precision guided munitions; there would also be remarkable changes in the prosecution of conventional wars under a nuclear backdrop.

Herein, firstly, the tactical and operational levels of warfare are getting overlapped and the stages for conduct of war are getting blurred. That calls for decision making authority being delegated down to local commanders. Secondly, integrated war-fighting has become mandatory (a rule rather than an option) which further warrants inter-operability amongst the Services as well as with the forces of friendly countries. Finally, even within the mould of conventional wars, there might be built-in elements of hybrid warfare – a combination of special, sub-conventional and information based operations. Indeed, the field of warfare in the contemporary period has expanded and become more complex to handle.

Needless to say, that a suitable HDO is thus a pre-requisite to face these challenges. The overriding inference is that an archaic HDO like ours would not work in the modern regime that stands further transformed by the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). Let us then see as to what could be the desired construct for a HOD that could effectively respond to the changing modes of warfare and the challenges that may confront India.

Part IV – Desired HDO

HDO – The Desired End State

In any future conflict, it would be mandatory for the government to lay down the ‘Political Objective of war’ and define the ‘Political End State’, from which in turn the military would deduce the desired ‘Operational End State’. This is more imperative now as the days of ‘total victory’ are passé. Point to note here is that defining of the political objectives will be shaped by the nation’s political leadership in consultation with various concerned civil professionals and the military leadership. Herein, the bureaucracy would join in to help translate the process into action. But when it comes to the application of military power, the same cannot but be a purely military responsibility which would require a high degree of professionalism and experience. Decision making process at the HDO, therefore, has to have close political and military participation, with the bureaucracy working as a facilitator. Indeed, this is how the HDOs are structured in advanced countries, even if the forms and nomenclatures may vary. To that end, the desired construct and roles of a contemporary HDO should conform to as enumerated subsequently.

Intra-Services

- (a) **Jointness.** This is a pre-requisite in today’s complex wars. It has to be ensured by all the three Services.
- (b) **Selection to the Post of Army Commanders Equivalent.** One very important step to ensure the best quality of leadership at the highest level in the Defence Forces can be ensured by introducing a system of selection for the posts of Army Commander equivalent in all the Services.

Composition of CCS. The Chiefs must be made permanent invitees to the CCS on all issues related to national security.

CDS or Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. In the era of joint war-fighting and integration of military power, institution of a CDS – or a Permanent Chairman of the COSC - should be a mandatory component of the HDO. However, this institution must be tailored to the indigenous conditions and not aped from the western models. As regards the responsibility of the CDS / Permanent Chairman of COSC, the operational control of the respective services must continue to be exercised by the Service Chiefs. The CDS may exercise control over all matters warranting jointness like joint planning, joint procurement and joint training etc. The control of the SFC, and Cyber and Space Commands (when instituted), and the military role in the Executive Council of the NCA should be transferred to the CDS. The time, however, is not yet ripe to institute ‘Theatre Commands’ as we are not yet trained and ready for them. It may well have to wait for another decade.

Single of the CDS vis-à-vis Service Chiefs. It follows, therefore, that to start with, the CDS must be termed as the first among the equals (for want of better words) to the extent of rendering single-point military advice to the Government, and optimisation of the force-structure in tune with operational synergy at the one end, and avoidance of redundancies and expensive duplications at the other. However, this does not make him senior to the other Chiefs, wherein his date of commissioning will be the dictating factor.

Integration of MoD. The MoD should venture into true integration between military professionals and civilian bureaucracy. The continued postings of Service Headquarters functioning as ‘Attached Offices’ behind the veil of ‘integration’ must end. The Ministry must be run by the services-bureaucracy interfaced staff and cross-postings at the decision making levels must become the norm. The MoD’s Allocation of Business and Transaction of Business Rules should be formally modified to incorporate a combined service-bureaucracy staff. Finally, for the senior bureaucracy in the MoD, prior experience at lower levels in the MoD must be a mandatory requirement.

Services as Prime Players in Decision Making. The military leadership must be an intrinsic and continuous part of planning and decision making process in the HDO, rather than being confined just to the execution part of it.

Constitution of National Preparedness Council (NPC). Defence preparedness being a national responsibility and not just that of the Government, a new security apex body may be constituted, which may be called as the ‘National Preparedness Council’ (NPC). It should have all permanent members of the CCS and leaders from all major political parties (with over 10 or more members in the Parliament) as its members. In order to sensitise the NPC regarding the concerns of national security and the state of defence preparedness, it would be beneficial to have the Service Chiefs brief the political leadership ‘in camera’ twice a year. Such an arrangement, if approved, will provide continuity in national security matters irrespective of the party in power in the Centre. Importantly, it would also insulate the state of national defence preparedness from the domain of partisan politics. The entire idea is to ensure that the security preparedness remains non-partisan. A somewhat similar arrangement exists in the US wherein the Service Chiefs testify before the Senate on defence preparedness as also the Secretaries of Defence and State testify before the Senate on departmental issues. This takes the arrangement out of party politics. To overcome the existing weaknesses/loopholes in defence preparedness of our country, if the idea of the Constitution of the National Preparedness Council is not politically acceptable/viable, then, the arrangement as mentioned above in the case of US may be considered. In such a case an exception will have to be made for the Ministers to appear before the Parliamentary Committee of Defence or any other such desired arrangement.

The HDO - A Catalyst in Building Nation’s Self-reliance in Defence Production. It should be designated to play promotional part in development of the indigenous Defence Industrial Base (DIB), and should be able to provide for a military interface to the idea of ‘Make in India’. Joint ventures with foreign companies to manufacture in India may be more workable than just seeking niche technologies which nobody will part with. Gradually, therefore, our own corporates must be assigned more and more avenues for industrial progress. ‘Make in India’ will thus be formalised as the golden principle.

Modernisation through Our Own DIB. Military modernisation is one of the weakest links in our defence management. The reasons for its long-standing stagnation are the lack of trust in our own corporates and over-reliance on the DRDO. It is, therefore, most necessary to set up our own DIB over the next 20 years or so. The work on this has already begun.

Defence Budget to be Commensurate with the Security Challenges. Needless to state that there is a gaping mismatch between defence planning and its funding. The latter has fallen to the lowest denominator of allocation of funds, resulting in the widening capability gap between us and our adversaries. Finding a rationalised meeting point between the divergence of defence planning and funding would, therefore, be a key role for the HDO. The present allocation of 1.7 per cent of the GDP is grossly inadequate. Gradually, we have to move towards a Defence Budget of up to 3 per cent of our GDP in order to ensure preparedness to the levels as warranted by the national security challenges.

Institute a System of Pre-Audit. We have instituted an effective Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP). However, there is a long cycle of complex procedures which are fraught with the concerns of propriety and manipulative complaints. Thus, while the controlling role of the HDO in the DPP would continue to be in force, it is most desirable to introduce a system of pre-audit wherein the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) and even Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) participate in the process - with due provision for pre-audit. Thereafter, no complaint should be entertained once a deal is signed. If there is a requirement of modification of the existing laws in enabling the CAG and CVC’s participation, a non-partisan NPC will certainly be of great help to steer the bill through the Parliament.

Articulation of National Security Doctrine and Strategy. Finally, the Government, as a pre-requisite, should be able to articulate an appropriate ‘National Security Doctrine’ and ‘National Security Strategy’. These will help the military to find clear directions in meeting the challenges in the coming years. The National Security Doctrine should clearly define “Red Lines” which should be known to all so that, our reactions to the breach of the same are virtually automatic unless stopped, as also, these reactions are not misunderstood by the environment.

Conclusion

In order to project a credible narrative commensurate to its potentials and aspirations at national, regional and global arena, the polity must be wise to realise the relevance of its military institutions. It must prevent itself from relapsing into the misinformed rhetoric of ‘no war – and managing only through soft power’. And then, because of five years election cycle, there is the problematic psychology of short term narratives. These potential disorientations are the by-products of inadequate construction of our HDO, and manifest through the ominous sign of declining defence allocations while other nations are constantly modernising their forces. China is undergoing a massive reorganisation and restructuring programme of their forces, and that should be a lesson for us.

In the context of the state’s apparent insensitivity to the soldier’s dignity even if it is they who have time and again proved to be its ultimate saviour against all threats and calamities, this malice would over time affect the quality of intake into the Armed Forces, and consequently, their performance in defending Indian sovereignty. Given her security challenges, India can ill afford that.

Finally, the military institution, on its part, has to rise up to the complex challenges facing it through; on one hand, upgrading of its military professionalism by ensuring inter-services jointness, and on the other, display of professional uprightness and following of the traditional courage of conviction. Only then will they remain worthy of the admiration and respect of the Nation.

*Text of the talk delivered by General NC Vij, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM (Retd), former Chief of the Army Staff at USI on 28 Sep 2016 with Shri Kanwal Sibal, IFS (Retd) former Foreign Secretary in the Chair.

@General NC Vij, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM (Retd) was Chief of the Army Staff from 01 Jan 2003-31 Jan 2005. Post retirement, he was the former Vice-Chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority from Sep 2005 to Sep 2010 in the rank of a Cabinet Minister. He is currently the Director of the Vivekananda International Foundation since Jun 2014, a think tank in New Delhi.