

Reminiscing My Tenure as Director USI: 2009-2019

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The United Service Institution (USI) of India is a unique,

autonomous institution which is unparalleled in its scope, reach and expertise. Founded in 1870, it is one of the oldest institutions of its kind in the world and has built an outstanding reputation. As an old member of the institution, it was a great honour and privilege to be informed by the USI Council in Oct 2008 that I had been selected to be the next Director, and would take over from Lieutenant General Satish Nambiar on 01 Jan 2009. On retirement as the Army Commander of the South Western Command, Jaipur, I had moved to Kasauli in Sep 2008 and had to repack and move to Delhi in Dec 2008. It was a memorable 11 years thereafter that I spent in Delhi as the Director, USI.

Like all members of the USI, I was generally aware of the activities and functioning of the institution but was not aware of the opportunities for the growth of the institution and the challenges that I would face in running it. I was fortunate to have the frank advice of committed senior officers who were serving or had served in the USI in different capacities on the Council as also on the staff of the institution. I am particularly grateful to Generals SK Sinha, SL Menezes, VR Raghavan, Vinay Shankar, HS Lidder, YK Gera, PJS Sandhu, Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, Brigadier MS Chowdhury, Colonel VK Singh and Squadron Leader RTS Chhina for their support and guidance. Having gone through Minutes of the Council meetings, the SOPs and the briefings, I decided on the following:

- To enlarge the national and international footprint of the institution by participating in seminars/workshops etc., and forging partnerships including with universities and research

institutions. This would also enable us to send a large number of our experts to represent the USI.

- There was a need to host preferably two international seminars every year, with one focussing on China and the Indo-Pacific Region.
- The Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research (CAFHR), which was set up in the year 2000, had established a niche for itself but the time had come to enlarge its activities into different fields nationally and internationally. Similarly, the Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK), which was also set up in the year 2000, had established a name for itself as a training institution pitched at the tactical level. There was a need to enlarge our contribution on policy, doctrinal and strategic issues related to UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding issues.
- The Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3), which was set up in the year 2005, had the potential to carryout Net Assessment and Strategic Gaming Exercises at different institutions, nationally and internationally.
- To reach out to institutions in our neighbourhood as also countries with which our strategic national interests coincide.
- Last, but not least, were two inter-related issues which were to remain major challenges throughout my tenure. The first was the issue of financial health of the Institution. While it was far-sighted to set up CS3, CAFHR and CUNPK with the concurrence of the Service Headquarters, finances for running these Centres was not adequately thought through. We were running these Centres by allotment from our Corpus Fund thereby depleting our financial resources – this is not a sustainable model. The other issue was of support from the Service Headquarters. Till the USI was the only Service think tank/institution, we had all the support including limited financial support, but with the raising of four new think tanks by the Service Headquarters and Headquarters IDS, their patronage of the USI kept declining.

The USI is a membership based institution and the members are our greatest asset. During the last decade over 3500 Life Members were enrolled. However, there is a declining trend which can only be reversed by the support of the Services. Since many of the young officers were not too enthusiastic to join as Life/Ordinary members but were keen to join the courses being conducted, we introduced a category termed 'Course Membership' which received a good response. A new category of Life Members called 'Special Member Civilian', with tenure capped at 10 years, was also introduced. Professional advancement of serving officers has always been an important activity of the institution and as far back as 1903 we began assisting officers in preparing for examinations in tactical fitness for command and promotion. The Course Section continues to do yeoman service by helping officers in their professional advancement through correspondence courses and contact programmes. During the period 2009 to 2019, a total of 23,330 officers subscribed to the various courses conducted by us. I would like to compliment the Heads of the Course Section during my tenure, viz. Brigadier MS Chowdhury (Retd) and Major Gen SB Asthana, (Retd) for their hard work and tireless efforts in carrying out the duties of Chief Instructor in an exemplary and thoroughly professional manner; and their entire team for its hard work. Their dedication has been appreciated by all and has brought added laurels to the USI.

The USI-CAFHR and the USI-CS3 have, during the last decade, covered new ground nationally and internationally. While the many faceted new activities have been spelt out in the Annual Reports of the President of the Council, I would like to highlight a few over here too in the succeeding paragraphs.

To honour the sacrifice of Indian servicemen during WW I, the CAFHR conceptualised and executed the plans for the construction of the Indian Great War Memorial at Villers-Guislain, France. The onsite work was supervised by Squadron Leader Rana Chhina (Retd) and Major General PK Goswami (Retd). The memorial was inaugurated by Shri M Venkaiah Naidu, Hon'ble Vice President of India, on 10 Nov 2018. I had the proud privilege to represent the institution at the inaugural ceremonies. The CAFHR also successfully spearheaded the 'India and the Great

War Centenary Commemoration Project' during the period 2014-2018 and as part of this, conducted activities in India and abroad. The Seminar of the Great War Centenary Commemoration Project was inaugurated by HE Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, the then Hon'ble Vice President of India. It is to Squadron Leader Rana Chhina's credit that he also assisted the Bangladesh National Museum to reorganise and renovate its permanent exhibition galleries relating to the 1971 War of Liberation. The CAFHR also curated 'Travelling Exhibitions' on India and the Great War, which travelled to 18 different locations across France and Belgium during Aug-Nov 2018. The CAFHR also conducted 'Staff Rides' on the Chhamb Battles of 1965 and 1971 at Kachreal, Jammu, in collaboration with the Directorate General of Military Operations. The CAFHR also commenced a community engagement programme 'India Remembers' in 2016. As part of this, we also mooted the proposal that the Marigold flower join the Poppy as an Indian symbol of Remembrance. The CAFHR and the National Army Museum (NAM), UK, collaborated to organise the first Military Museum Curator's Course in New Delhi; which was extremely well received. This course was the first among the list of activities planned under the British-Indian Military Heritage Partnership signed between the USI and NAM. I must also bring out that an excellent biography of Lt Gen Sagat Singh, titled 'A Talent for War: The Military Biography of Lieutenant General Sagat Singh', was authored by Major General Randhir Singh and published in 2013. I met the then Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), presented him with a copy of the book and recommended that the biography of Lieutenant General Sagat Singh be included for study in promotion/competitive exams. I regret to say that despite my meetings with subsequent Chiefs too, this has not happened.

The CS3 continued its efforts to expand the range of activities in various domains. It undertook important Net Assessment projects for the HQ IDS and the National Security Council Secretariat. The CS3 also conducted Strategic Games and panel discussions at the National Defence College, the Services War Colleges, the Foreign Service Institute, the National Police Academy, the RSIS Singapore, the National Defence College, Oman and Amity University. It also conducted the Core

Programme at the Army and Naval War Colleges. The CS3 received a large number of foreign delegations and also conducted customised programmes for military officers, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) scientists, and interns from various universities. The internship programmes for under-graduate and post-graduate students that we conduct twice a year are extremely popular. The USI has signed numerous Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with international institutions and conducts joint programmes with them, the latest being a joint book project with the Sichuan University, China and the Nigerian Army Resource Center, Nigeria. Our bilateral interactions in Afghanistan, China, Vietnam etc. are conducted annually. Sadly, in the year 2020 these got curtailed due to the Covid pandemic. We had commenced holding an international seminar on the Indo-Pacific Region in Nov 2009 and the eleventh edition of this seminar was hosted in Nov 2019, and it was my privilege to have mentored these very educative and successful International Conferences for 11 years. The USI has participated in all the editions of the Xiangshan Forum hosted by the PLA in China. We have also participated in the SCO Forum conferences in Tashkent, Moscow and Sochi, and the Shangri-la Dialogue. Our international seminars attract experts from around the world. The proceedings of the seminar are published as a book annually, the one published in 2019 was titled 'Evolving Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region-Challenges and Prospects'. Needless to say, the CS3 continued to focus on quality research and it is a matter of pride for us that all our research scholars, whether on 'study leave' with us or those holding 'Chairs of Excellence' have researched and published high quality single author books. We continue to encourage our scholars and interns to write for our 'Strategic Perspectives' and 'Blog' which are available on our digital webpage. The USI has a very robust international engagement programme, and our scholars and experts have participated at events in USA, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea, Vietnam, Israel, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Sweden, Norway, Jordan etc. I was conscious of the fact that the USI has a large number of experts amongst its members and it would add to our reputation if they could participate in international conferences abroad on different

themes and subjects. Therefore, during my tenure over 100 scholars/experts represented the USI abroad and their presentations were extremely well received.

To carry out research on 'India-Tibet Relations 1947-1962', the Field Marshal Cariappa Chair was allotted to the eminent historian Mr Claude Arpi for a period of four years during which he published a four volume treatise on the subject. Three other research projects which gave me great joy are the book researched and authored by Major General AJS Sandhu on the Battle of Chhamb titled 'Battle Ground Chhamb – The Indo-Pak War of 1971'. It was our proud privilege to host the legendary Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh who released the book titled 'In Memorium – The Fallen Air Warriors' authored by Air Marshal Bharat Kumar in 2018. We had constituted a Study Team to analyse some material we had obtained about the Chinese View on the 1962 India-China War. It is to the credit of Major General PJS Sandhu, Deputy Director & Editor USI, who steered the Study Team and brought out an exceptionally well researched book titled '1962: A View From the Other Side of the Hill' – a must read book.

Despite the books and monographs published by our researchers, we found 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 evolution and dissemination of strategic thought, we decided to bring out an 'Annual Strategic Year Book'. The CS3 took on this project and the first issue was published in the year 2016 and since then, we have published four annual issues, each one of which was received extremely well. The 'Strategic Year Book 2020' on which we had commenced work in mid-2019 has since been published. Major General YK Gera and Major General BK Sharma steered the CS3 exceptionally well as Head of CS3. They were very ably supported by Lieutenant General GS Katoch (Retd), Major General Rajiv Narayanan (Retd), Major General PK Goswami (Retd), Major General RKS Bhadauria (Retd), Brigadier Narender Kumar (Retd), Group Captain Sharad Tewari (Retd), Dr Roshan Khanijo and Mr Gaurav Kumar.

The USI had set up the USI CUNPK in Dec 2000 and nurtured it for 14 years during which period it established a name for itself as a Centre of Excellence for training of potential and serving peacekeepers. During my visit to the UN Headquarters, I had met the Under-Secretary-General (USG), Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and briefed him about the USI and the CUNPK and requested him to support the USI in conducting events which would help the UNDPKO. The USG very graciously accepted my proposal and in Apr 2011 we conducted an international seminar on 'Peacekeeping Vision 2015: Capabilities for Future Mandates' supported by the UNDPKO and Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Norway. General VK Singh, the then COAS, delivered the Inaugural Address and also interacted with the UNDPKO team which was led by the Assistant Secretary-General (ASG), DPKO. Though the Army Headquarters decided to move the CUNPK from the USI after a fire incident that occurred in 2014, we continue to support their activities and are happy to see them grow.

To enlarge upon our contribution on policy, doctrinal and strategic issues related to UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding, the USI became founding member of three international organisations viz., The Challenges Forum, The Peace Capacities Network, and Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON). In addition, our interaction with the Swedish Armed Forces International Centre continues and the USI has a member on their Advisory Board. I must acknowledge the support that I received from former Blue Berets, Generals Jetley, Bhagat, RK Mehta, Rajender Singh, Abhijit Guha, Chander Prakash, AK Bardaloi, Shashi Asthana and Karunakaran, who represented the USI in projects and conferences abroad. Our outreach did not end there. In Feb 2015, we hosted a three member delegation of the UN High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (also informally known as the Horta Panel) comprising Mr Jose-Ramos Horta, Nobel Laureate, former President of Timor-Leste and Chair of the Panel, Ms Ameera Haq, Deputy Chair, and Lieutenant General Abhijit Guha, a distinguished Blue Beret, member of the USI and member of the Panel. The interaction was extremely well received by the Panel. In March 2015, we had organised a UN

Force Commanders Meeting which was attended by serving and former Force Commanders from India, Nigeria, Norway, Bangladesh, Nepal, Ethiopia and Tanzania. The aim was to share experiences and discuss the broad recommendations that could be sent to the Horta Panel. Based on the discussions and suggestions made by the three Indian Force Commanders who had participated, I sent out our recommendations to HE Mr Horta for consideration by the Horta Panel.

I also strongly believed that the time had come for India to participate in international conferences on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). In March 2015, Lieutenant General Rajender Singh, a former UN Force Commander, represented the USI at an international workshop on the subject in Cambodia. Based on our inputs, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) supported us in hosting an international seminar on 'R2P' in Apr 2015. The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, New York, partnered us. The Secretary, Additional Secretary, and the Joint Secretary MEA participated and articulated India's position on R2P. We also ventured into the field of 'gender issues' and hosted a joint USI-UN Women integrated training programme on 'Mainstreaming Gender in UN Peacekeeping to end Conflict Related Sexual Violence' in Feb 2018. In Nov 2018, supported by the MEA we organised a discussion with a US Department of State delegation on issues pertaining to Peacekeeping at the strategic level and the possibility of increasing India-US partnership in this regard. In May 2019, we hosted the Countess of Wessex, who is the Brand Ambassador of the UN on Women, Peace and Security to a Round Table Discussion on the subject 'Women, Peace and Security in the New Dimensions of Conflict'.

Our library, with over 69,000 books, is a storehouse of knowledge and archival material. We have added over 7,500 books during the last decade but unfortunately the library remains under-utilised which in this era of digitisation and internet available knowledge is a world-wide malaise. The USI Journal continues to provide members with a forum to express their views and keep abreast of developments in the field of security, defence strategy and international relations. In keeping with contemporary trends and to make our humble contribution to the environment, the

Journal has been digitised since Jan 2017. A new website was also designed in the year 2019, and we also set up account on social media like Facebook and Twitter to increase our outreach.

We also broke new ground by sending our experts to participate in international conferences on nuclear issues and also on Special Forces in Amman, Jordan. The participation of our experts was very well received. We also ventured into the field of 'Glacier Studies' and 'Solar Power'. To highlight the importance of our glaciers, we initiated a project to fix the snouts of some important glaciers. During the period 2010 to 2012, we sent out small teams supported by the Army to Gangotri and Siachin in 2010, Kolahoi in 2011, and Baspa and Bara Shigri in 2012. As far as the solar power project is concerned, we are the first institution to install roof top solar panels for power generation. The generation capacity of the solar power plant is 270 KW.

It gives me great satisfaction to highlight that during the period 2009 to 2019, we published 166 books/monographs on a diverse range of subjects. During this period, we also signed 34 MOUs with foreign institutions.

Having given an overview of the activities carried out, a word about matters financial. As I have mentioned above, I was worried that we would face financial difficulties as we were eating into our Corpus to run our Centres, our expenditure would continue to rise, the interest rates would decrease, and there was no financial support forthcoming from the Services. To address this challenge, I followed a multi-pronged approach – first was to reach out to our training institutions and Colonel Commandants of all Regiments asking them to encourage passing out Gentlemen Cadets (GCs) and officers to join the USI. I must place on record that the Officers Training Academy (OTA), Chennai supported us wholeheartedly and my special thanks to Lieutenant General RP Sahi, then Commandant OTA for his unqualified support. Next, I reached out to embassies, universities and institutions abroad to give us research projects. I would like to thank NUPI, Norway, American University, USA, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA, British High Commission, New Delhi, Belgian Embassy, New Delhi amongst others for their support.

I must place on record my sincere appreciation of the Service Chiefs who wholeheartedly supported my request in the year 2010 to make a onetime grant of Rs 10 crores to the USI, so as to bring it at par with the financial support provided to the other Service Think Tanks by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) on the recommendation of HQ IDS (the USI for some reason was excluded from the proposal sent by HQ IDS). After a formal presentation by me to the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) in Aug 2010, the COSC approved the proposal for a one time grant of Rs 10 crores to the USI. Despite the approval of the COSC, and my pursuing the case with Shri Antony, Shri Parrikar, the then Raksha Mantri (RMs), the Service Chiefs and the USI Council, over nine years have elapsed but the USI has still not received any funds.

I would like to bring to the notice of all members of the institution, the noble gesture of my NDA course mate and friend Colonel PS Gill. One day Colonel and Mrs Gill came to my office and expressed their desire to establish a Chair of Excellence in the memory of their son Flying Officer Amandeep Singh Gill, a fighter pilot, who was killed in an IAF air crash. Colonel and Mrs Gill willingly and very graciously donated Rs 20 lakh to establish the Chair of Excellence, which we have done. In the 150 years of history of the USI, no other member has made a donation to establish a Chair. What is more, the amount donated is more than what we have received to establish the other Chairs! On behalf of all members of the USI, I would like to sincerely thank Colonel and Mrs Gill. The memory of their son, Flying Officer Amandeep Singh Gill, will always live in the USI.

And finally a few words about our 'Administrative Section' which is truly the backbone of the USI. They remain in the background and silently work for the good of the entire Institution. Believe me, it is the most important Section of the USI and the Deputy Director Administration has a 24/7 job which requires total commitment. I was fortunate to have Colonel VK Singh and Major General PK Goswami as the Deputy Director Administration (DDA) during my tenure. They not only ran the Section efficiently but coordinated all activities of the USI. More importantly, they gave me frank advice on all facets of the running of the institution.

Nothing escaped their sharp eyes! My sincere appreciation and thanks to Colonel VK and General Goswami.

It has been an honour, and a privilege, to have served the USI and its members. I would like to pay tribute to the dedication and commitment of the staff of the institution who, by their dedicated hard work, made my task so much easier. I would like to particularly acknowledge the sterling contributions of Major General YK Gera, Colonel VK Singh, Major General PJS Sandhu, Lieutenant General Chander Prakash, Major General BK Sharma, Major General SB Asthana, Major General PK Goswami, Brigadier MS Chowdhury, Lieutenant Colonel BS Verma, Squadron Leader RTS Chhina, and core team of Distinguished Fellows and Senior Research Fellows comprising Lieutenant General GS Katoch, Major General Rajiv Narayanan, Major General RPS Bhaduria, Brigadier Narender Kumar, Group Captain Sharad Tewari, Dr Roshan Khanijo and Mr Gaurav Kumar, who worked tirelessly to bring up the name of our institution. I would be failing in my duty if I did not acknowledge the contribution of 'Residency Resorts' to the USI, so ably led by Shri Sudhir Kapoor. The subordinate staff in the various sections contributed in considerable measure to the effective functioning of the Institution. I must place on record my compliments to Mrs Savita Saluja, who as my Personal Assistant served with devotion and dedication.

The years I have spent as Director of the institution have been very satisfying and rewarding. Whatever I have achieved was due to the support of the Service Chiefs, Council Members, 'elders and well-wishers' of the institution, and the totally dedicated team that we have at the USI. It has indeed been an honour to have been the Director and I will treasure the memories of my tenure here. And, finally I would like to wish Major General BK Sharma, who served with distinction as the Deputy Director (Research) under me and has taken over from me as the Director, 'Good Luck and God Speed' in all his endeavours.

May God bless the USI.

Jai Hind!

©Lieutenant General PK Singh, PVSM, AVSM (Retd) is the former GOC-in-C, South Western Command and Colonel Commandant, Regiment of Artillery. He was Director of the USI from 01 January 2009 to 31 December 2019.

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