

Evolving Military Strategy

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Introduction

Post Independence, India still does not have a National Security Strategy (NSS). Resultantly, not only has the growth and modernization of our military suffered but defence sector reforms are given short shrift. Military integration remains a casualty despite way back in 2004, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh having said, *"Reforms within the Armed Forces also involve recognition of the fact that our Navy, Air Force and the Army can no longer function in compartments with exclusive chains of command and single service operational plans"*.¹

Strategy and Theory

There are many definitions of strategy.² A simple one calls it, *"The art and science of distributing and applying military power to attain national objectives in peace and war"*.³ The US War College describes strategy and its critical components as: Strategy = Ends (objective or goals) + Ways (courses of action to achieve chosen goals) + Means (resources to enable courses of action). Strategic theory relates to past experiences and lessons learnt. Clausewitz had said, *"Theory exists so that one need not start afresh each time sorting out material and ploughing through it, but will find it ready to hand and in good order"*. If we don't study lessons of previous wars, campaigns, and apply them to strategy, then we are likely to make the same mistakes over and over again. We failed to learn importance of navy and use of naval infantry from the Chola Empire (9th to 13th Century) and did not pay attention to our Navy in initial years post Independence. We have suffered externally sponsored terrorism for decades but have not developed requisite deterrence. Strategic theory also facilitates the recognition of own limitations. Our Parliament passed a resolution in 1994 that Kashmir is integral to India. Accession of Kashmir implies that we

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should integrate the seven regions of Kashmir Valley, Jammu, Ladakh, POK, Gilgit-Baltistan and Northern Areas of Pakistan, Shaksgam Valley and Aksai Chin. Strategic theory can tell us how this can or cannot be done and question whether we have developed required military capability.

Factors Affecting Military Strategy

Factors affecting military strategy include national interests, war duration, geography, technology, enemy war potential, influence and restrictions of domestic politics and international political factors (political configuration, strategic intentions and balance of power). International and domestic politics determine military strategy. Chinese consider geostrategic relationships, geographic elements (position, size, natural resources), human geographic elements, geo-economic relations, conflicting state interests, religious sects, alliances, strategic studies of war from various aspects and stages. National Interest is both a starting point and destination of Chinese Science of Strategy encompassing laws of war and its conduct, and laws of evolution of strategic thought.

Strategic Culture

Strategy depends on combination of military and diplomatic instruments a state brings to bear against security needs. Strategic culture refers to a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, habits, symbols, achievements, ways of adapting to environment and solving problems related to the threat and use of force. Strategic culture can be viewed through military choices, policy or politico dynamic that is operative in India since Independence. It is an interdependent matrix incorporating all elements relevant to the nation's strategic necessity. Since political leadership largely determines national strategy, political culture is a major influence on strategic culture; a set of attitudes and sentiments that give order and meaning to political process and which provide underlying assumption and rules that govern the political system, encompassing theoretical ideas and operating norms.

Military Strategy Over The Years

The period 1947-1962 saw fighting in J&K, Hyderabad, liberation of Goa, Chinese annexation of Tibet and the 1962 Sino-Indian war. Our strategy was reactive, less in Hyderabad and Goa. Ironically, India went to UN after self imposed ceasefire in 1948

when Pakistanis were routed and retreating. More significantly, Vallabhbhai Patel's advice on China and Army's caution on Aksai Chin were disregarded. Vallabhbhai Patel's 7 November 1950 letter to Nehru which had warning of Chinese irredentism is highly revealing in this regard.⁴ The 1962 directive to an ill prepared and ill equipped Army to throw the Chinese out was ill advised, besides air power was not used to support ground operations. The operation stank of political unilateralism, lack of strategic thinking, planning and vision. Period 1963-1970 witnessed some equipping and reorganization of the military, however, there was no institutionalized defence planning. During 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, for the first time large forces were employed by commanders; but we surrendered the strategic advantage of capturing the Hajipir Pass, which would have reduced future infiltration routes of Pakistani terrorists.

The 1971 Indo-Pak war which culminated in the birth of Bangladesh witnessed good military strategy on the part of India and tri-Service employment of forces. The politico-military connect was courtesy personal equation of Sam Manekshaw with Indira Gandhi. The aftermath again displayed lack of strategic thinking – despite 92,000 prisoners of war we did not solve the J&K issue with Pakistan and did not even straighten the Siliguri Corridor. During 1972-1990 in Pokhran 1 (1974), we were 10 years behind China and should have completed testing but we chose to halt and lag behind China to-date. Subsequently, we beat Pakistan in occupying the Saltoro Ridge in Siachen area and witnessed Army deployment in J&K and Punjab, plus re-engagement with China.

Then came IPKF deployment in Sri Lanka and operations in Maldives. The LTTE and political hierarchy of Sri Lanka were completely misread. General Sundarji had an equation with Rajiv Gandhi but the politico-military connect per se was still not institutionalized. Moreover, R&AW kept on working at cross purposes with the IPKF.

1991 and beyond witnessed terror upgrade in J&K, Pokhran 2 (1998), IC-814 hijack, Kargil conflict (1999), 9/11 and Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), attack on Indian Parliament, Mumbai and other terror attacks. Our strategy for internal security, particularly in respect of Maoist insurgency, remains flawed with little political content – termed by analysts “political unilateralism” with socio-political-economic nature of the problem unrecognized - reliance on security forces without effort to improve governance.

Fundamental Vulnerabilities

Our strategic policy paralysis stems from the post Independence legacy of disdain and distrust of military. Our fundamental vulnerabilities in chalking out an effective military strategy have been marginalization of military in India's defence policy making, inability to use military as an instrument of policy making, lack of institutional capacity to give defence policy a long-term strategic orientation and adhoc approach to defence acquisitions. War making and peace keeping are definitive features of any nation state but war making capacity has been systematically factored out of our foreign policy and national security matrix, eroding credibility. Culture of long-term strategic thinking has failed to evolve for lack of meaningful institutions that can effectively leverage national resources in furtherance of clearly defined political goals. India's emergence as a power is a matter of national potential that cannot be based on economic factors alone. We appear to be out of sync with rapidly changing global environment; status quo as opposed to conceptualizing at strategic level. Bureaucratic inertia prevents implementing recommendations of various committee reports. On national security issues, state institutions do not work because the government in power may not want them to work. The onus falls on bureaucracy that is not organized to think strategically, prefers isolation and uninterested in wider knowledge base.

During the Kargil conflict General Ved Prakash Malik, then Army Chief had said, "We will fight with what we have".⁵ Pentagon's South Asia Defence and Strategic Year Book 2010 states, "India's policy paralysis was exemplified as in New Delhi after the Mumbai terror attacks when Indians to their horror found that due to blatant politicization of military acquisitions India no longer enjoyed conventional superiority vis-à-vis Pakistan, throwing Indian military posture in complete disarray and resulting in loss of credibility."⁶ More recently, former Army Chief General VK Singh's leaked letter to the Prime Minister spoke volumes on military neglect. As to integration of the Armed Forces, General S Padmanabhan, former COAS had stated, "There is no escaping the military logic of creating suitably constituted Integrated Theatre Commands and Functional Commands for the Armed Forces as a whole." General Malik, says, "It is not my case that the Service Chiefs do not cooperate in war. Were they not to do so, it would be churlish. But in war, cooperative synergies are simply not good enough." The

Kargil conflict showed serious shortages in intelligence, inter-service and civil-military coordination, equipping etc. Little has been done to remedy fundamental weaknesses in national security set up despite Kargil Review Committee recommendations. Same problems were encountered during Mumbai terror attacks.

The security sector remains inadequately organized, equipped, funded, trained and integrated. The NSC must be able to anticipate national security threats, coordinate management of national security and engender new bold ideas. We have no National Security Strategy document for the last 65 years. No CDS has been appointed and HQ IDS is not integrated with MoD. Joint military operations are adhoc – no Integrated Theatre Commands. There is no national concept to optimize Special Forces for deterrence against non-conventional threats. Post Kargil, the message conveyed by India was that we do not have capacity to impose quick and effective retribution. Similarly, post Operation *Parakaram* message conveyed was that we are unprepared to inflict surgical strikes on terrorist camps in POK / Pakistan. While Pakistan has acquired new technologies / weapons under GWOT, we have shown little progress particularly on the indigenisation front. Army's "Cold Start Doctrine" has never been discussed at the Government level. The Army has also been talking of a two and a half front policy but the Government has never discussed it. Our defence R&D and PSUs remain un-focused and minimal private industry participation in defence sector is permitted. Debate on defence policy tends to not go beyond increasing big ticket military acquisitions without long term strategic review and without an overall defence strategy.

Threats

Besides a collusive China-Pakistan conventional threat, both are already targeting India asymmetrically including through terrorism or supporting (arming, funding, training) homegrown insurgencies. China provides tacit support to Pakistan's anti-India *jihadi* policy and has positioned PLA in guise of development workers in countries surrounding us. The coming generation of Chinese, likely to assume power in Beijing five years hence, is assessed to be much more aggressive and assertive. PLA is likely to consolidate power, increasing chances of forays across unsettled borders. Pakistan shows no signs of dismantling the anti-India terrorist

infrastructure and post US/NATO thin-out from Afghanistan. Rapidly increasing radicalization of Pakistan indicates dark times. India must also manage social change with a burgeoning population. Threats that India will face are: accelerated asymmetric war; terrorism and insurgencies; heightened China-Pak threat; conventional war in nuclear backdrop; conventional and asymmetric war overlap; and finally, a half front war internally – mishandling of which can actually make it the ‘third front’.

Evolving Military Strategy

A National Military Strategy (NMS) should flow out from the National Security Strategy. The NSS (yet to be defined in our case) should logically articulate objectives, courses of action and means to achieve the objectives. The NMS is essentially a subset within the broader NSS ensuring that the military elements of national power are available to contribute to the NSS in peace and war and reviewed periodically as influenced by political and economic decisions. The NMS should define objectives, military strategic concepts and resources. India is a developing nation whose burgeoning population is likely to overtake China's by year 2030. Therefore, the central theme for most part of the 21st Century will continue to be economic modernization. Our NMS should therefore focus on:-

(a) Objectives. Safeguard India's sovereignty and territorial integrity; protect national interests in furtherance of national objectives; dissuade adversaries waging conflict - use deterrence / coercion; decisively repel aggression in any form; modernizing the military to ensure India's development and growth as a global player.

(b) Courses of Action. Optimize use of military as an instrument of national power; build military asymmetries in own favour; strategic partnerships with countries facing common threats; deny enemy controlling own fault lines; control enemy fault lines.

(c) Resources. Our military modernization should cater for five dimensional conflict (aerospace, land, sea, cyber and electromagnetic) with information dominance and information assurance, catering to all forms of combat (space combat, cyberspace combat, radiation combat, robotic combat, nano-

technology combat), creating fully NCW capable forces integrated with other components of national power, equipped with mix of hard kill and soft kill options including Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs), Precision Guided Missiles (PGMs), Anti-Satellite (ASATs), layered strategic air and theatre missile defence, long range expeditionary strategic forces and ability to exploit and dominate space, cyber space and electro-magnetic domains.

Sun Tzu had said, *"The essence of warfare is creating ambiguity in the perceptions of the enemy."* While militarily catering for a "two and a half front", as a nation we should ensure the following:-

- (a) Avoid a situation where we have to fight two external adversaries simultaneously.
- (b) Create deterrence against non-conventional threats to our security and asymmetric wars.
- (c) Manage internal social change adroitly, thus ensuring that the military does not have to look over its shoulder when fighting externally.

Indian military desperately needs a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) to address our voids, including in terms of policy formulation. Lack of politico-military inertia requires redoubled efforts to help build political will. Public awareness is required to mould national opinion and decision making. The requirement is actually for an act of Parliament to usher in RMA. There is urgent need to appoint a CDS and make the CDS / Chairman COSC permanent member of CCS and NSC besides, having permanent military staff in National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) which should include serving military officers. HQ IDS should be merged with MoD and interfaced with MEA-MHA. Integrated Theatre and Integrated Functional Commands are required including an Integrated Special Forces Command and Integrated Cyber Command. Presently, the military does not even have common data structure, symbology and interoperable protocols. True 'system of systems' approach has yet to come. We need to accelerate integrated Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Information, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4I2SR) system, integrated communications,

network enabled platforms and exploit technologies like steerable beam, wide band / software defined radios, network security, common GIS, data fusion & analysis, dynamic bandwidth management etc. Indigenization must include critical hardware, software, telecom equipment and chip production. The leadership, both civil and military, must adapt to the changing nature of war.

Conclusion

Lack of a NSS and NMS have inhibited the rise of India, creating an environment that encourages adversaries to act askance. Continuation of such lackadaisical approach will adversely affect both our security and economy. The Naresh Chandra Committee has reinforced some of the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee. It is high time that India accords priority to build its own comprehensive national power which should include optimizing the military potential.

Endnotes

1. Unified Commanders Conference 2004: statement by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh while addressing the conference.
2. The Free Dictionary by FARLEX: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/national+military+strategy>
3. David M. Finkelstein: China's National Military Strategy http://www.prgs.edu/content/dam/rand/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF145/CF145.chap7.pdf
4. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's letter to Jawaharlal Nehru on 7 November 1950: <http://www.friendsoftibet.org/main/sardar.html>
5. Pentagon's South Asia Defense and Strategic Year Book 2012: http://books.google.co.in/books/about/Pentagon_s_South_Asia_Defence_and_Strate.html?id=YX8-AQAAIAAJ&redir_esc=y
6. Col PK Vasudeva (Retd), Leaked Letter a Blessing in Disguise, Hindustan Times, 02 Jun 2012 <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Punjab/Chandigarh/Leaked-letter-a-blessing-in-disguise/SP-Article1-864845.aspx>