

Relevance of Territorial Army and Its Future Employment¹

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"Rise and fall of a nation rests with every one of its citizens" - Chinese Proverb

Introduction

The roots of Territorial Army (TA) are deeply entrenched in our ancient culture and society. Since time immemorial, participation by local citizens in defence of their homeland has been a practice in India.² In the times of kings and emperors, small *Jagirdaars* were supposed to muster requisite number of trained soldiers to their state forces at the time of war. Local peasants and workers from rural areas were the potential soldiers and used to be listed for this noble duty.

After the British arrival in India, the British Indian Army evolved as an organisation. Post-Independence, the responsibility of national security solely came on to own armed forces which were quite less in number and inadequately equipped. At that point of time, it had been decided to have a lighter standing army with a strong component of part-time reserve (TA). To assist *three lakh* standing army, about *one lakh forty thousand* TA³ had been suggested. But due to sour relations with China and Pakistan, the strength of our standing army had to be increased. By and by, the part-time army (TA) got marginalised and major responsibility of national security shifted towards Regular Army (RA). Certain security related duties within the society which could be looked after by TA were also handed over to a large number of newly raised police and para-military forces units. Under such circumstances, the part-time concept became difficult to sustain. In this backdrop, an obvious question therefore arises as to why should there be TA at all in the Country?

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Reasons for TA Concept Not Being Very Successful in India

The concept of part-time service (TA) was very well received by the nation after Independence. Big personalities from many fields ventured to enroll themselves and avail this unique opportunity. Being part of this concept used to be taken as a mark of patriotism, respect and dignity. The concept spread its wings in Navy and Air Force as well. However, with passage of time, the patriotic fervour amongst the population started to subside and enthusiasm towards TA waned. The Navy and Air Force also did not expand the concept further and merged their existing part-time wings into their regular components. The lack of interest for the organisation was mainly due to sudden expansion of regular components of the armed forces, coupled with collective indifference on part of people, government and the army. The following were the main reasons for TA concept being sidelined:-

(a) Social Reasons. The sudden attainment of independence and liberty amongst the people could not be matched with change in people's attitude and a sense of added social responsibility. In the process of hurrying up industrialisation and infrastructural make over in the Country, a very important aspect of citizens' participation in national security was overlooked. This was due to:

- (i) Concept of easy life.
- (ii) Fading national spirit.
- (iii) Unrealistic race for material gains.
- (iv) Changing lifestyle and work culture.
- (v) Tight working schedules due to massive privatisation.
- (vi) Employers' indifference towards national security.

(b) Departmental Reasons. Within the armed forces, the concept of peoples' participation in the security mechanism of the nation could not be holistically comprehended and constructively exploited. This resulted into passive approach of everyone towards this wonderful concept. The possible reason for this were:

- (i) Mismatch between RA and TA on perception of TA's capabilities and employment.

- (ii) TA rules/regulations were not changed with changing times.
- (iii) No road map followed on expansion/employment of TA.
- (iv) Lack of national campaign to revive the concept.
- (v) Reduction in urban type of TA units.

(c) Reasons Attributable to the Government. There has been very little involvement and support from the government side in propagating and restoring the confidence of the population in the Citizens' Army (TA). This is reflected in its action over a period of time:

- (i) No review on TA since 1996.
- (ii) No concrete action on the recommendations of previous reviews.
- (iii) No effort made to make statutory binding for government employees for giving their services to TA for specified duration during their civil service.
- (iv) Lack of incentives to private players for sparing their employees for enrolling into TA.
- (v) Negligible propagation of national security and peoples' obligations through school text books.
- (vi) Non participation by politicians/bureaucrats in security set-up of the Country by volunteering and enrolling in TA.

Relevance of TA in Present Scenario

The term, 'Security', is becoming more and more complex by the day in our society. Ever since Pakistan enforced proxy war on India, the dimension of warfare has totally changed. The threat from hostile nations is no more directional and confined to frontiers only. The conventions on fighting wars are disregarded and have become redundant and hollow. Today, enemy-trained and sponsored terrorists can strike at a place of their choice with full impunity. In the present scenario where armed forces in the Country are already overstretched in dealing with 15000 km of land border

and 7000 km sea coast, it is humanly impossible for them to be present everywhere to meet each eventuality. The complete society has to, somehow, get involved in the fight against proxy war. The security should become responsibility of each individual of the society and, therefore, the existing link between army and society in the form of Citizens' Force (TA), needs to be strengthened. Certain internal security duties and disaster related tasks should be handed over to the TA. There is no harm in replicating good lessons learnt from other countries in this regard. Concurrently, TA needs to be prepared in defensive roles to deal with various situations within the Country for its own survival and security of the installations it may be guarding. This will provide added impetus to army; and in future, TA will be in a position to shoulder more responsibility and be employed in defensive operations during war.

Applicability of Concept of TA in Present Situation

The fundamental thought behind having a force of common citizens on part-time basis is to create and have a large pool of reserves for war time employment; which should be all inclusive and maintainable at lowest cost during peace time. This involves making use of volunteer citizens from all walks of society who do not want army as their full time career but wish to contribute their services during war or any other national emergency. This force should be able to support, supplement and augment the resources of the RA. The concept is still applicable and fully suited to connect the RA to civil society to train and keep more and more people ready to defeat enemy's new designs of destabilising our Country.

Current Employment of TA

The role and task defined for TA enables it to undertake second line duties during war i.e. guard duties at static installations, escort duties with convoys and Prisoners of War (PW) cages, rear area security duties etc. This role was defined, probably considering the fact that less training was imparted to TA personnel compared to regulars, in the past. However, with the introduction of nine months of training (equal to their counter parts in RA), TA personnel are qualified now to participate in operations and take on at least defensive, if not offensive operations during war. At present, even without having the role revised, most of the Commanders committed in operations, are employing TA for defensive tasks like road opening, establishment cordons during 'cordon and search'

operations and other sensitive tasks of guarding Command/Corps HQ. The execution of these tasks by TA personnel has been exceptionally professional. It is high time that higher commanders put across their views at appropriate forums on revision of role/task of TA. Some of the advantages that TA offers are:-

- (a) Cost effectiveness.
- (b) Creation and availability of trained reserve.
- (c) Interface between Security Forces and civil population.
- (d) Information on the area available even when troops are disembodied.
- (e) Rehabilitation of ex- servicemen in Ecological TA units.
- (f) Source of employment to locals in remote/ border areas (in case of Home & Hearth TA units).

Future Employment of TA

The TA having inherent flexibility to its credit, can be modified to meet the army's requirements in many different ways. As regards employment of the TA in future, there are numerous fields where TA can contribute constructively and establish its footprint. Dual task units in the following fields can be very effective in supplementing RA efforts:-

- (a) Suitably equipped and trained TA units can be employed along with regular units in a *holding role* during war. These units can be embodied when the formations they are affiliated to, are conducting their collective training or exercises.
- (b) *Engineers* based TA units consisting of troops recruited from local districts can be very useful for construction of defences and repair of LC fencing. Such tasks are season specific and accordingly, these units can be embodied as on required basis. This will help avoiding routine induction of engineer resources year after year for this task.
- (c) Specified number of TA units having dual task for *disaster management* can be considered to be raised in disaster prone regions⁴. They could be accordingly equipped to meet disaster related challenges and can be embodied during floods/ monsoons as also when some unforeseen calamities like earthquakes and fire related accidents take place. Capabilities

of these units can be enhanced by organising capsule courses for men under the aegis of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

(d) TA units can be raised for undertaking duties as *medical stretcher bearers* and as specialists for *shifting of logistics loads* at important Rail/Road Heads during war. Part of these could be utilised, if required, for convoy protection and other escort duties while operating in counter-insurgency (CI) environment. This will help relieve regular troops for other operational tasks. During peace, they continue to follow the TA concept of two months embodiment for their training etc.

(e) Making use of obsolete equipment in the *Armoured Corps and Artillery*,⁵ TA units based on these arms⁶ can be raised from local areas on the lines of Home and Hearth units. Such units can be very useful for plugging the appreciated gaps and enemy thrust lines in deserts where defences are widespread and based on nodes. Also, during disembodiment of troops, the nucleus staff (permanent staff) will continue to be on ground throughout the year and can act as an intelligence detachment for a particular sector. With raising of these units, the age old problem of mechanised columns and artillery guns reaching their forward areas with much difficulty at the last moment, will also be quelled as nuclei of permanently stationed TA units will immediately come into action and troops will be embodied within acceptable time frame.

(f) Information Technology (IT) TA units consisting of IT qualified specialists from the civil society can be raised on specific requirements. These people can be embodied on as required basis to work on programmes to enable countering possible enemy cyber-attacks on defence forces networks and war plans etc. They can also be used to take proactive measures against target countries.

(g) TA units are most suited for providing *aid to civil authorities*. This fact has been accepted by the US Government as well; and they are extensively using their National Guard for such tasks.⁷ TA units based on Home and Hearth concept will be well suited for naxal affected areas of the Country.

(h) Ecological TA units based on ex-servicemen have been engaged in many states for preserving flora and fauna. These are commonly called *Ecological Task Forces* and are showing exceptionally good results. Such units can be planned for all states to enhance the green cover. Also, some vacant areas held with army; especially firing ranges, can be selected for plantation by these Task Forces in future.

Recommendations

Appreciating the flexibility and vast potential that the TA has, the following is recommended:-

- (a) Revision in role and tasks of TA⁸ from existing second line duties to *defensive operations* for providing better assistance to Regular Army during war.
- (b) Embodiment of TA units/subunits to *rehearse their tasks* along with Regular Army units during operational rehearsals of the formations concerned.
- (c) Adequate expansion of TA to enable it to provide a TA battalion to each holding brigade. This will ensure added strength and continuity/overlap at the time of rotation of regular units.
- (d) As a step towards becoming a Green Army, each corps zone should have one Ministry of Defence (MoD) funded *Ecological Battalion*. These battalions should will be based on state ex-servicemen for undertaking plantation and landscaping operations; tailor-made at times, to suit Commanders' operational plans.

Conclusion

The systematic strengthening of part-time concept in the Defence Forces is in national interest; as members of society from various walks of life contribute towards national security. The 'Citizens' Army' represents the complete society and careful nurturing of this organisation can provide the nation with a readymade reserve that can be instrumental in addressing all dimensions of enemy designs during war. It must be kept in mind that future wars will not be fought on national frontiers only. Enemy will simultaneously confront us in many spheres which will have a direct bearing on

numerous facets of society; and hence, integration of society into the defence set-up of the Country is a national imperative.

Endnotes

1. Territorial Army (TA): GlobalSecurity.org
2. '*Evolution of Territorial Army*' by Lt Col AK Bakshi: Sainik Samachar; mod.nic.in/samachar/17/html/ch11.htm
3. '*The Citizens'Army – A Coffee Table Book on TA*' by Additional Directorate General Territorial Army.
4. CLAWS: Article No 1019 Dt 15/10/2007: '*Role of Army in Disaster Management*' by Col Ravi Tuteja.
5. '*Inception of Territorial Army (Artillery)*' by Col E Govind: The Artillery Journal; Sep 2011.
6. '*All for the Nation*' – Interview of ADG (TA): purpleberet.com.
7. National Guard of the United States: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.
8. '*Territorial Army Vision 2020*': Press Information Bureau, Government of India.