

Restructuring The Army

Managing Transition And Change

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During the Army Commanders Conference in October 2018, the focus of discussions and decisions was on 'Restructuring the Army'. The preparatory work for the restructuring was carried out by four major studies aimed to achieve an agile and flexible structure for the

field formations, a younger profile for the Army leadership especially at the fighting level, optimizing the terms of engagement and 'colour' service of Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and Other Ranks (OR) and, last but not the least, streamlining the duplication at Army HQ and enhancing its efficiency.

The proposed restructuring of the Army has triggered interest and imagination of not only the soldiers and veterans, but also of the defence and strategic community the world over and the nation in general, aided by the transparent and frank statements from the Army supported by an analytical and inquisitive media.

The Indian army is the second largest army in the world. It is also the largest volunteer army and among one of the most combat rich, battle hardened, professional, committed, disciplined and effective force in the world. This, despite some antiquated organisations, structural and systematic infirmities, a pronounced obsolescence in weapons and equipment, inadequate budgetary allocations and with little or no say in the national security architecture and decision-making.

Given the multiplicity of threats to our national security across all domains, it is essential that a pragmatic and dispassionate analysis be carried out so as to derive desired military capabilities and enhance capacities, given that the defence budget is limited and will remain so, due to competitive and imperative national priorities of development and poverty alleviation. The security challenges however dictate a manpower centric deployment of troops for border defence along LAC, ensuring sanctity of the LC, an effective counter infiltration grid on the LC and counter terrorist operations.

Financial Outlay

The Indian Army, in particular, and the Armed

Forces in general, are always under budgetary stress. The need to prune and cut costs is a constant and continuous challenge. The defence budget will always be limited and inadequate to meet future security challenges on account of competing national priorities. This, of course, has become much more pronounced as the defence budget for the current financial year (FY 18-19) is the lowest in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) percentage at 1.56 of the GDP. The Indian Army, at nearly 1.2mn, is manpower heavy and, hence, the revenue budget, which caters for the pay and allowances is high, leaving little in terms of capital budget impacting modernisation. Though this may appear to be so and is a common belief, it needs a pragmatic analysis in view of our vast security challenges.

Magnitude of Army's Role

The armed forces are mandated to ensure the territorial integrity of our nation, which also implies securing our borders. India has the longest disputed land borders in the world - 3488 km of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) along the India-China border, 772 km of the Line of control (LC) in J&K and 126 km of the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) in Siachen Glacier in addition to a 7516 km long coastline. India's unsettled and porous borders manned by the army lie at altitudes of 4,500 meters and above with woefully inadequate infrastructure and extreme climatic conditions demanding ab initio deployment of a large number of troops. China's aggressiveness and assertiveness is increasing, both in intensity and frequency, as witnessed in the 73-day long standoff at Doklam along the India-Bhutan-China trijunction. The continuing proxy war being waged by Pakistan, the ever increasing and omnipresent threat from terrorists and the imperative to safeguard our national interests and assets in our areas of influence, dictate that we enhance capacities and build capabilities.

Meeting Challenges of Modern Warfare

There is no denying the fact that the Indian Army needs to be restructured, reorganized and reorient to effectively meet the emerging challenges of new age warfare. The Armed Forces as also all other national security structures and support systems need an overhaul. The need is to carry out a holistic restructuring of the entire

Prime Minister on Reforming the Armed Forces

While addressing the Combined Commanders Conference in December 2015 onboard INS Vikramaditya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi challenged senior military commanders to reform their "beliefs, doctrines, objectives and strategies." Modi identified six areas for military reforms to include restructuring higher defence organisation, defence planning, joint warfare, manpower rationalization (Teeth-to-Tail ratio), defence procurement and professional military education".

The prime minister's directions challenged the established structures, systems and organisations of India's military and the mindset of senior military leaders. Prior to this Modi also said "At a time when major powers are reducing their forces and rely more on technology, we are still constantly seeking to expand the size of our forces. Modernisation and expansion of forces at

the same time is a difficult and unnecessary goal. We need forces that are agile, mobile and driven by technology, not just human valour."

The prime minister's directions were categorical and clear and, if implemented sincerely and in a time bound and effective manner keeping the focus on national security, the Indian military will transform from a 'military force to military power'. Unfortunately, the status quo continues and other than some talk there has been no serious effort by the Ministry of Defence to address the directions. It is only the Army, which has taken note of the directions and has taken the initiative and initiated the change. Gen Bipin Rawat, the Chief of the Indian Army, deserves the credit for demonstrating an urgent and positive resolve for the long overdue restructuring of the Army.

security apparatus and organizations to enhance the combat effectiveness of the Armed Forces and optimize the defence expenditure.

Over the years a number of transformational studies have been conducted by the Army alone, only to find their resting place in the cupboards of Army HQ. Whatever be the planned changes, the first thing should be to study and carry out a 'Cause and Effect Analysis' – as generally happens, organisations often resolve one problem but create a few more, thereafter, going in a loop of corrections adversely impacting effectiveness. The restructuring and reform should aim at enhancing combat effectiveness and, in that, may address the issues of 'congruence between organizational needs and individual aspirations' as motivation and moral is a critical component of war fighting.

Given our war-waging strategy (Proactive) along the Western borders, there is a need for restructuring. Some of the Divisions can be reconfigured into Brigade groups and can be directly controlled operationally by the Corps HQ. This, however, may not be feasible in the high altitude areas (HAA) and the Northern borders, given the current state of our infrastructure and single and fragile lines of communication prone to disruptions. With available communication means the Corps HQ has the capability and ability to command and control brigades and Integrated Battle groups (IBGs), this has been practiced to an extent in exercises and war games. However, prior to change the concept will need to be validated through test-bed exercises.

Leadership Profile

The need to reduce the number of ranks from nine to six is dictated by an imperative to ensure status equivalence and addressing the aspirations of the military leaders as the government has not agreed to grant Non-Functional Upgrade (NFU) and review the cadre. As per Department of Personnel & Training (DOPT) rules a cadre review of all Group A and Group B services is carried out every five years - last cadre review for the army was done in 1983/1984 and, thereafter, only for the officers by the AV Singh Committee. This has resulted in major command and control issues in conjointly manned organizations like Army HQ, Military Engineer Service (MES), Border Roads Organisation (BRO), Directorate General of Quality Assurance (DGQA), Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO), etc, as established norms and hierarchy have been violated leading to these organizations becoming somewhat dysfunctional.

The Army needs to restructure and earlier the better. However, the restructuring cannot be single service specific. The Indian Air Force, in particular, and the Indian Navy have to be factored in the proposed restructuring. New age warfare will be a multi-domain, multi-dimensional, wherein wars will be fought in many battle spaces from land, sea, air, space, sub-surface, cyber and informational. In order to optimize the available resources to enhance combat effectiveness, the three Services should evolve joint structures, organizations, systems and operational philosophies and doctrines to fight and win future conflicts in the Indian context. The restructuring,



Operational change may involve employment of integrated all arms battle groups instead of brigades

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per se, should be driven by a single consideration of enhancing the combat effectiveness to ensure a viable war prevention strategy. The focus has to be on war prevention, war waging and war fighting strategies, there being a subtle difference between the three. Apparently, the proposed restructuring factors in combat efficacy, but is driven by budget constraints to prune manpower to effect savings in the pay and allowances and balance the revenue and capital expenditure. The other driving force for the restructuring is the Human Resource issue, especially that of status equivalence among the military leadership and the civil counterparts. This also includes the refusal to grant NFU to the armed forces.

Recommendations

It is an established fact that nations always prepare and fight the last war. To assume that the Armed Forces are not prepared to combat future security challenges would be incorrect. However, the concepts, doctrines, capabilities and

capacities required may not be adequate. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Armed Forces have shied away from initiating reforms and disturbing the status quo. The resistance to structural and systematic changes and a review of policies, procedures and processes to keep pace with future security challenges and modern day multi-domain warfare remains a major weakness. The MoD and the armed forces need to review and rebalance force structures to optimise the combat power and synergise all assets to ensure a secure nation, the people and assets across the full spectrum of conflict. This can only be achieved by a pragmatic approach in ensuring synergy, integration and jointness among the MoD and the armed forces both inter- and intra-service, revamping the logistics support systems by integrating civil infrastructure and resources reducing the 'Teeth-to-Tail ratio', inducting 'Force Substitutors' and, equally importantly, a hard and dispassionate review of the effectiveness and efficiency of over six hundred thousand non-combatants/ civilian employees in various support organisations like DRDO, Indian Ordnance Factories, DGQA, DGAQA, MES, Controller General of Defence Accounts (CGDA), Directorate General of Defence Estates (DGDE) and BRO among others, paid out of the defence budget – the real though latent tail.

Wars in today's context cannot be fought with outdated organisations and structures, wherein the Army, the Navy and the Air Force conduct operations in a linear stand-alone mode, with coordination and cooperation only being achieved based on personalities. War is a joint endeavour, wherein all elements of national power and all resources of the Union are synergised. This truism is even more relevant in the present context, as warfare today is a complex phenomenon likely to be waged in the multi-dimensional and multi-domain space. This complexity will increase in the future. The reasons include high technology, the nature of modern

war, new threats and challenges and the reality of nuclear weapons in the arsenal of our potential adversaries. Consequently, a joint force, which acts in an integrated manner, is not just desirable but an imperative. The complexities of the future security environment demand that India be prepared to face a wide range of threats of varying levels of intensity. Success in countering these threats will require skillful integration of the core competencies of the three Services into an integrated force structure. However, reorganisation by itself will not succeed in achieving such integration. What is also required is a change in mindset, a change that makes every soldier, sailor and air warrior feel that he is a member of the Indian Armed Forces and not just the Indian Army, the Indian Navy or the Indian Air Force.

What is actually needed is a holistic look at not only the 56% of the defence budget (Army Budget) but the complete defence expenditure. An exercise, which was recently conducted by a Committee of Experts under Lt Gen DB Shekatkar convened by the MoD in 2016. Of the 218 recommendations only 65 have been approved for implementation. These too are only the low-hanging fruit. The recommendations with regard to macro issues have not been addressed, having been confined to the cold storage. These include the restructuring and revamping of the 615 thousand civilian employees paid out of the defence budget (tail) in less than efficient organization like DRDO, Indian Ordnance Factories, DGQA, DGAQA, MES, CGDA, DGDE and BRO among others. The MoD has also not

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considered other major recommendations of integration of the MoD, the nomination of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and other important defence reforms including those of Higher Defence Organisation. These are the issues, which need to be addressed for any reasonable restructuring to be effective.

For any meaningful restructuring the Army needs to factor in transition management. One of the major reasons for non-implementation of earlier studies has been the lack of any thought and plan to manage transition. Given India's security challenges, the Army in particular has to be effective and functioning at all times. The Army to factor in the transition management must constitute a monitoring organization. responsible

and accountable only to the Chief to ensure an effective transition - a flat and lean organisation on the lines of Chiefs Advisory Board.

The modernisation of China's Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) is an indicator. The transformation of PLA is top driven with very tight timelines and, hence, at the unit level there is reportedly confusion and uncertainty in the role definition and tasks allocation. A situation in which the Indian Army on account of its internal security commitment and a proactive strategy can ill afford. Another major challenge is the change management. It is a given that Armies the world over, specially big armies, resist change and live in a comfort zone based on their history and traditions. It is indeed near impossible for Armies to change. It took the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 to thrust a change in the US Army. Even after three decades, though, the structures have changed but the mindset mostly remains the same 'My Service, my Regiment and my Unit first'. The Army will need to factor in and plan the change and implement it in a pragmatic and doable manner. There is an old saying in the Army - the more things change the more constant they remain.

In case the recommendations of the Army are implemented in part by MoD the exercise will result in degrading the effectiveness of the army and major functional problems. The proposals, after due deliberations, need to be implemented in totality and not in part as it is most likely to happen seeing from past precedence and experience. The MoD should also initiate the restructuring of all organisations under its control in keeping with the directions of the Prime Minister.



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