

**Talk by Lt General A K Singh (Retd), Lt Governor,
Andaman & Nicobar Islands
on “National Security and Governance”
at Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI)
on June 11, 2014**

(Excerpts)

General

To start with, what is the motivation to come and talk here? As an Army General it is part of my ethos to give back to the organisation and share my experiences in a large number of army institutions. I was coming to talk at the College of Defence Management on “Strategy and Military Strategy” and my Chief Secretary suggested that I also visit the Administrative Staff College of India, and that’s how Dr. Rao (the Director General, ASCI) kindly agreed to invite me for a talk. It was a pleasant surprise to see that the first Principal, who established this College way back in 1957, is none other than our ex-Chief, General Shrinagesh. I think it is high time that the people in uniform start associating with this College in some way or the other. Mr. Padmanabhaiah (former Home Secretary) has also expressed similar views. In most advanced countries there is a very healthy interaction – give and take between the people in uniform and those in the private sector. That’s how we pick up the best practices from each other and this has been my endeavour - both when I was in uniform and now out of it. Today I plan to share a few thoughts on National Security, Matters Military and Governance.

The subject I will cover is of great importance to all of us. As we progress through the 21st century, many issues confront our country and I dare say, a large number of these issues would be common to our part of the world – people who live in South Asia, and, I suppose, friends from Sri Lanka present here, will derive some benefit out of my talk.

Concept of India

Ladies and gentlemen, to start with, let’s be clear about the concept of India. India’s culture has been marked by a high degree of cultural pluralism and capacity to absorb outside influences over centuries. Notwithstanding its ancient civilization and inherited wisdom, India remains somewhat tentative and insecure about the use of power in the 21st Century. In the process, our efforts to develop and shape an indigenous strategic identity have also been adhoc, and sometimes

not in our best interest. The preamble to the Indian Constitution spells out the basic philosophies underlining the Indian nation state – the key aspects are sovereignty, a democratic republic that is socialist and secular and one that provides its citizens justice, social, economic and political. Also enshrined are Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship – equality of status and of opportunity and to promote among all its citizens – fraternity assuring dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation. I find all this quite remarkable, when I read it again and again and I think most citizens would do well to read the preamble to our Constitution.

Status Check

So let's do a status check on where have we reached in our journey in the last six to seven decades. Given the challenges that faced India at birth, not many had given her a chance to succeed in the manner that we have. The story of emerging India is, therefore, catching the imagination of the world and whether we want it or not, India, in my opinion, will be a player on the world scene: our growing economy, our intellectual capacity and our acknowledged military power will ensure so. India today is a major stakeholder power, and is using this power to reconfigure relations with the major powers of the world – for example, with the US, we had a people and trade driven relationship, which we are now converting into a strategic relationship; and so with many other countries of importance and interest to us.

We are still tentative in our relationship with China, and I suppose with the new government in place, this will also evolve over a period of time. Shedding its non-alignment and wanting to retain Strategic Autonomy, India is leveraging its stakes into positions of influence, thus giving credence to its policy of “Omni Alignment” as compared to what we use to follow earlier, Non-Alignment.

There are many positives in the emerging India story. An emerging economy to start with, a vibrant middle class that has raised consumption levels significantly thereby creating a huge internal market. A vigilant and powerful media which works as a watch dog, however imperfect that may be, but I think the most important leap of faith taken by emerging India is a change in our attitude: from an earlier attitude where we said “let me not loose”, to our present attitude where we say “I can, I shall, I will”.

Notwithstanding this huge leap forward, there are enormous challenges that have to be met in the areas of rural development, urban sustainability,

national infrastructure and human capital. Priority now must be not only growth but on the triple canons of growth, inclusion and environmental sustainability. As one of the most crowded countries, India needs to address this more urgently than others. Let us now look at the challenges our country faces today. Despite great economic and political progress, India remains somewhat a fragile state and society. There are religious fault lines, there are regional fault lines; there is economic polarization, with obscene wealth accumulation and abysmal poverty living side by side, and that is an unpalatable truth of the 21st century India. Hunger still stalks large numbers; food grains are abundant but the distribution is warped. Corruption seems to be prevalent everywhere, which has generated the current backlash. The new Govt under our Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modiji has given a new direction and momentum towards growth, overcoming the myriad challenges we face.

Let's talk of the demography – a growing population from 1.04 bn in 2000 to 1.21 bn in 2010, probably stabilizing to 1.6 bn in 2050. It comes as a package - the good news is that the world has acknowledged India's young entrepreneurial youth power because they are the game changers of a competitive India. But this youth bulge can also be a ticking time bomb, if we are unable to create the right opportunities and the hope of progress. A million graduates every year sounds good but where is the employment? I think the present government has rightly identified this as one of the major challenges. The Hon'ble Prime Minister's call to stress on **“Speed, Scale and Skills”** is indeed timely, along with the necessity to harmonise developmental and environmental issues.

National Security

Against this backdrop of where we stand today, let's look at National Security. The concept of national security in the 21st century, ladies and gentlemen, encompasses five determinants. These are political stability, economic growth, diplomatic and military strength, societal development and environmental protection. In today's world, competition is more in the economic sphere than in the military field. National power is being measured more in terms of per capita growth in GNP than pure military prowess. The other phenomenon that impacts national security in the 21st century is the diminishing power of the State. Concentration of economic power in private and multi-national businesses and financial institutions, increasing influences of non-governmental organisations and non-stake actors is eroding state monopoly on power. Yet, mind you, the expectations from the government have not reduced, leading to pulls and additional pressures. The rise of sub nationalism, ethnicity and assertion of political identity is another unpalatable truth of the 21st century.

Therefore, against this backdrop, let's look at the security environment that India faces. I will start with the external environment. India has the disadvantage of being situated in close proximity to what is being described as the epicenter of "Global Terrorism" and we have seen effects of that over the last decade or two. Combined with that is the unpredictable and sometimes deteriorating relationship that we have in our periphery and unstable political climate in some of our neighbouring countries. This renders any fair estimation of Indian preparedness, to deal with the security challenges and tasks, a challenging exercise.

Pakistan

Due to shortage of time, I shall confine myself to Pakistan and China, our two major neighbours. Let me talk of Pakistan first. In my view, Pakistan continues to remain the principal national security challenge in the short term and in all the military dimensions: sub-conventional and conventional with a nuclear backdrop. The Pakistan army remains fixated to implacable hostility towards India as a strategic fundamental, and despite India extending its hand of friendship on numerous occasions - the last one being when our Prime Minister invited the PM of Pakistan - we do not see any basic change in their attitude. We hope it does change. Moreover, irrationality of Pakistan cannot be excluded from our security calculus, more so on account of its internal contradictions. So what should be our strategy to deal with Pakistan? I think as a neighbour, our strategy must be one of friendship and the Indian government and the Indian people are actually quite keen on developing this friendship between the two countries. But let us also be clear, that it takes two to achieve this. Our hand of friendship cannot be taken as a sign of weakness. Pakistan must also realize that there is a limit to India's patience and that there will be costs to continuing misadventures against us.

China

As far as China is concerned, there are issues of convergence and issues of divergence. Despite the positive progress in India-China relations in the past three decades, unresolved border issues and mutual distrust still remains. Added to this is the often repeated unpredictable behaviour of various organs, especially the PLA, as you often keep hearing in the media of the various transgressions that continue to occur on the line of actual control. We also cannot ignore the massive development of infrastructure in the Tibet autonomous region and the related rapid deployment capability of PLA. China, therefore in my view, remains

the major long-term challenge to our National Security. I would not use the word 'threat' but the word challenge would be more appropriate. What should be our strategy towards China? I think engage on multiple levels: trade, commerce, cultural and political engagement, but from a position of strength. We need to build up our strength, both in terms of infrastructure and military capabilities and I am sure that this is what is happening. Environmental hurdles, which have for long impeded development of infrastructure on our Eastern Borders, are being harmonized by the new Govt. on priority.

Internal Security

Let me now come to the internal environment. While there are large positives in our growth story, there are significant challenges in the internal realm. India's internal security challenges can be categorized under two heads - insurgency and extremism . There has to be consensus on several issues if India has to avoid continued and serious internal strife. First, we need to build a credible state that makes citizens feel secure, Second, we need to further develop models of governance that can address the sense of disempowerment in certain sections of the population. Third, we need a political culture that is tuned to diffusing conflict. Fourth, fair and transparent law enforcement and quick and efficient judicial apparatus are required to tide over various types of extremism. Fifth, good governance and delivery of services and social- economic justice, commensurate to the ideals enshrined in the constitution, become imperative.

Notwithstanding, people who pick up arms against the state must be dealt with very firmly and without any ambiguity. The state police forces should be the main responders and for this, they should be modernized and strengthened. The CPOs and the armed forces should be in a supporting role except where there is direct foreign involvement. It is indeed a complex task to determine which of the two threats, external or internal will be greater for India. In fact, both get inter-related at some level and, therefore, both threats need to be tackled comprehensively, if India is to emerge strong.

Do we have a policy for internal security? I don't think it has been articulated in a very formal manner but in practice we can decipher the following contours of a policy. The first is one of patience in dealing with such situations in the internal realm. The second is one of inclusive growth: bring such people into the main stream without compromising on national sovereignty, and, lastly, use of power but with an aim to win the hearts and minds - a velvet glove for the people and an iron fist for those who take up arms against the state.

Strategic Culture

If we are to understand how our response to national security has developed, we need to understand India's strategic culture. First, geography itself; India has never been a single strategic entity in the form it exists today. Moreover, there has been an insular perspective because of the way that we are situated, Himalayas to the North, seas in the South; therefore, a tradition of localism and particularism and an insular and inward looking focus remains predominant. Even historically, there have been limited periods of national unity in ancient India where there was a notion of what we know as 'Bharat'. There has very rarely been a focus or importance given to strategic defence of India as a whole rather it has been each principality looking after its own security affairs. And that strong tradition still continues in India. Then, of course, there are effects of our culture, social structures and religious beliefs. Indian culture keeps India united. India's unique culture imparts tendency towards diversity and accommodation to existing reality. Our great capacity to absorb dis-similar concepts and theories; anybody who came to India was absorbed. The caste system has been conservative and has propagated a non-innovative mindset, a status quo approach. Even after Independence, there was little structured strategic thinking and even then in compartments. However, things are beginning to change and we are sanguine that the new Govt will arrest this drift and define a comprehensive strategic direction.

So far, Indian grand strategy has de-emphasized the use of force and, consequently, the military and security establishment have received little strategic guidance. Indian defence needs reform and we need to start at the beginning, with a clear vision of the role of the military and use of force in the country's rise as a great power. This vision must balance domestic and external threats to security, including non-traditional and non-military challenges. As far as response strategy is concerned, I think that's a very delicate subject. When we get down to the operational mechanics of it, yes, there have to be various responses available to a government - it cannot be an all out or nothing situation. In my view, there has to be a greater response matrix that is available to the government on an escalatory continuum – what option the government would choose to exercise in a particular situation would be a very carefully thought out decision, taking into account the aftermath of the response and the escalatory matrix that could well follow. I would leave it at this, but let it be clear that even India's patience is finite and should not be construed as a weakness: there would be costs to any misadventure against us.

Matters Military

Of late, the Armed Forces are getting more & more into the news, specially the electronic media. Recently, I was taken aback to see full-fledged discussions on operational matters by arm chair journalists, strategists and, of course, those out of uniform; It is a domain that should remain sacred to those who have responsibility & accountability.

Having been in uniform for over 40 years, it is my pleasure to use this forum to share a few thoughts on matters military.

Role

The Armed Forces have a primary and a secondary role, which you are well aware of, but they also have a derived role which encompasses:-

- Nation building, specially in remote areas.
- Employment generation.
- Enhancing India's image through their conduct and professionalism.
- Pool of Disciplined & Skilled manpower (60000) who retire every year and contribute to society.
- Contribution in Sports, environment etc.

Core Values

Apolitical, secular & high levels of Personnel & Professional integrity - a true reflection of the Constitution of India.

Tenets of Indian Military Philosophy

- Multi-front obligations.
- India, not part of any military alliance or grouping; therefore, needs an Independent Deterrent Capability.
- A versatile capability across the spectrum of conflict.

Where do we stand & what are the challenges

The Armed Forces are the last resort of the Nation; they can't afford to fail or think of being runners-up even once; and the Indian Armed Forces are very conscious of this responsibility.

Operationally, the armed forces are capable of fulfilling their assigned roles; Yes, there are shortfalls, some severe - but they do have the minimum wherewithal even though may not have the optimum.

Leadership

Leadership in every situation has 3 Constituents: The Leader, the Led & the Environment. So how does leadership differ in the Armed forces?

- There is an unlimited liability contract between the soldier and the organization. You go where you are asked to and accomplish the assigned task, even at the cost of your life. In return the armed forces assure You that they will look after You and Yours.
- Deal with Life & Death Issues - not profit/gain.
- Last resort of the Nation and, therefore, cannot be runners-up even once.

The challenge is to develop & nurture combat leaders as distinct from Event Managers. Leaders, who lead from the front, look after their men & stand up when the chips are down, are forthright bold and transparent. While the armed forces are doing well on this front, being self critical, they must continuously reinforce this. In fact, as Southern Army Commander, my recipe for a 'Good Military Leader' was;

**“ Humility in his Persona”
&
“Arrogance in his Uniform”**

An Arrogance based on his integrity, his competence & commitment.

Governance

Governance is at the core of what Govt does or is supposed to do. So what is Governance – how does one define it and more importantly measure it. Simply put: “Governance is a Govt’s ability to make & enforce rules & to deliver services”.

It can be measured against a variety of parameters, some of which are

- Accountability of the Executive.
- Rule of law rather than Rule by Law.
- Effectiveness of service delivery.
- Regulatory quality.
- Control of Corruption & other unethical practices.

How has India evolved over the years? If you measure it against various statistics/Indicators, what inference can we draw?

- There has been improvement, but we could have done better.
- Social and Society indicators are poor on most counts.
- Economic disparities continue to rise.
- There is lack of transparency in the processes of Govt, leading to doubts on fairness.
- We rank at the 94th spot in a global list of 177 countries, as far as corruption is concerned.

Has Governance failed or not delivered upto expectations? If so, why?

- Governance in India has not delivered upto expectations.

- We are a young democracy (less than 70 years) – it takes time for a nation to evolve.
 - Large aspirations of a huge demographic size that wants progress to be fast tracked.
 - Systems/Institutions in the country not dynamic enough to keep pace with the fast changing aspirations.
- Nexus between various elements and stakeholders for furtherance of latent agenda(s), that corrodes welfare of the state.
- Quality of civil servants – Some relevant issues are:
 - Induction at an age when their mindsets are already firmed.
 - In-service training programmes are not tweaked to change this mindset.
 - A number of them enter service for self fulfillment.
- There are many other socio-economic reasons which you all are well aware of.

Way Forward

Having established that `All is not well' – What is the Recipe for Improvement, the `**Way Forward**'.

- Is it Top Down – Top First or the other way round?
- A code of conduct for all persons in positions of responsibility – Do we have one? The bureaucracy has Service conduct rules, but are they relevant in today's context? Do they provide a moral/ethical compass to guide the civil servants?
- Does the initial and in service training prepare the bureaucracy for the mine field outside – Periodic refreshers are certainly needed.

- Is it about the 'Fixed Tenures' or is it about the self !! Your own Integrity, competence and commitment.
- How do you deal with an unlawful order, do we have explicit guidelines? This needs formalized elaboration.
- Need for well trained specialized corps for handling an array of subjects viz. Finance, Defence etc. Joint Secretary and above posts in Government of India should be advertised and the best available appointed.
- Professional bodies such as those of Engineers, Doctors, Chartered accountants, Lawyers etc. should also work for the welfare of State and not act as mere lobbies for their respective clients.
- Need to work out a trade-off between diffusion of power and consolidation of power since empowered Ministries in the past often became chaotic, leading to non-delivery of services.
- Challenges posed by globalization - imply anticipation of global developments in real time and consequential policy endowment with knowledge packed inputs.
- Re-orienting the Foreign Policy so that strategic partnerships can be initiated for furthering the economics of the Nation (Production of goods, Market for the produce and resultant Wealth creation) – all adding upto clarity in strategic direction.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the large number of regulations and an economy trying to recover from the cross road of policy paralysis, the Indian story is still worth narrating with thousands of individuals contributing to our nation's life with a sense of commitment and humility. There seems to be hope in the way that the new Govt under our Hon'ble Prime Minister, Mr. Modi has livened up the issue of Governance with the slogan "Less Govt, more Governance", and a vigorous follow-up affirmative action.

I may end by reiterating that National security threats must be assessed from the totality of factors affecting the protection, safety, well being and

contentment of the people. Without good governance, these objectives can nullify all gains, thus posing real threat to National Security.

Will end with 2 Quotes:-

- “There is a debt of service due from every man/woman to his/her country & organization in proportion to the bounties which nature and fortune have measured to him/her. Ladies & Gentlemen, I am very conscious of this & shall do my best to live upto my obligations & the people’s expectations.
- And last but not the least, “Lets be reminded that we (You & I) exist in such high places only to serve the citizens and accomplish the assigned role/tasks. Therefore, commitment to our job, fidelity to our oath and the Nation & service above self should be our guiding motto”

Thank you – Jai Hind