

# 11. Civil–Military Dynamic: Making of Military Strategy

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## **Abstract**

A strongly developing nation, with a profound focus on economic development and the constancy of the guns versus butter debate, it is presumed that the civil-military relationship in India would have reached a kind of comfort that balances the two most imaginatively and pragmatically. For a nation that has unsettled borders, and is incessantly deployed in countering infiltration and terrorism, and left wing extremism, the bonding between the ‘civil’ and military is even more imperative. If Clausewitz is to be believed, and war is continuation of politics by other means, then, indeed, the politicians have the right to dictate on the typology of war. Indeed, the Generalship and the equivalence may war-game the planning and conduct of campaigns, the movement and disposition of forces incessantly; in finality, all these have the potential for reaching a nought at the zero-hour, on the altar of the lack of the political nod. Civilian control allows a nation to base its values, institutions, and practices on the popular will rather than on the choices of military leaders, whose outlook by definition focusses on the need for internal order and external security. The control that stands exercised by the government in India is largely in effect by the bureaucracy and, to a much lesser extent, the elected representatives, which too does not relate in any form in the evolution of military strategy.

Military strategy envisages employment of all of a nation’s military capabilities at the highest of levels, including long-term planning, development and procurement to assure victory or success. If not enunciated by the political establishment in peace, and if not planned, developed, trained for, or force created, in peace, then inadequacies in the achievement of political aims during a war will rest with the civil-military peace-time imbroglio. Military strategy derives itself from a political formulation of national aims, vision and

interests, implying dominant importance of political ends. This formulation is a complex bureaucratic-military decision-making process, relating political goals on contingencies or scenarios into military objectives. Hence, there is the necessity to possess standing mechanisms that formulate and plan application of the strategy, and constantly review, reassess and provide guidelines to further hone the military strategy as is considered obligatory. With an annual defence budget of nearly \$53 billion, which is nearly 13 percent of the total government expenditure, it is imperative that the oversight to its expenditure and creation of capabilities is guided under an enunciated military strategy.

## Setting the Stage

Tomes have been written in India, since independence on civil-military relations in India. “The Indian military, despite growth in its geostrategic importance, increased technological and organizational sophistication and use in internal security operations, stands firmly subordinate to civilian leaders of all parties and ideologies.”<sup>1</sup> A strongly developing nation with profound focus on economic development and the constancy of the guns versus butter debate, it is presumed that the civil-military relationship in India would have reached a kind of comfort level that balances the two most imaginatively and pragmatically. For a beleaguered nation that spends \$50-60 billion on defence, an assured consequence of thoughtlessly devaluing its own military will be that only second or third-rate men and women will answer the call to arms.<sup>2</sup>

In a nation that has unsettled borders, and is incessantly deployed in countering infiltration and terrorism, and left wing extremism, the bonding between the ‘civil’ and military is even more imperative. The seven decades of relationship had the doyen of strategic thinkers in India, Mr K. Subrahmanyam, call it the “absent dialogue” that directly translated into a system where *“politicians enjoy power without any responsibility, bureaucrats wield power without any accountability and the military assumes responsibility without any direction”*<sup>3</sup>. This well nigh sums up in exactitude, the political-bureaucratic-military equation! Indeed, the “objective control” that Prof Samuel Huntington referred to in the seminal work, *The Soldier and the State*, focussed on maximising military effectiveness, while ensuring civilian authority, and required “the recognition (from the civilian authorities) of autonomous military professionalism”. In other words, it was to be an acknowledgement,

by the civilian authorities that the military has an expertise that should not be interfered with. The politician sets the goal and the soldier is free to do what is required to achieve it, relying on his professionalism. The issue that needs highlighting in the treatise of Prof Huntington is that “the politician sets the goal.” The key to this paper is whether the goals are being set for the military to apply the strategy to achieve them.

Apparently civil-military relations and military strategy are contrarian terms in India, as far apart as it allows one to be insulated of the other. In the existential routine peace-time functioning, the bureaucracy retains a deliberate and well thought out detachment from strategy, shielding themselves from accountability and responsibility, and the political hierarchy is mired in more pressing matters and not inclined to contribute to the military’s conceptualisations and war-games of an unknown future.

The central theme of this discourse is to delve into the realms of political control on matters of military strategy, in forecasting and prognosticating on likely scenarios, and providing direction to the military in their preparations for such scenarios. The subject will be addressed by initially a somewhat rear-view-mirror vision, that is, learning from history, and then, in a positive recommendatory manner, providing directions in institutionalising methodologies for arriving at an appropriate military strategy.

### **Historical Underpinnings of Political Direction in Wars**

In their analyses, both Carl von Clausewitz and BH Liddell Hart put less emphasis on battles, and more on the means to fulfil the ends of (political) policy, giving preeminence to political aims. Clausewitz’s celebrated dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means neatly captures the fact that the management of strategy is a political business through-and-through.<sup>4</sup> If Clausewitz is to be believed, and war is continuation of politics by other means, then, indeed, the politicians have the right to dictate on the typology of war. Indeed, the Generalship and the equivalence may war-game the planning and conduct of campaigns, the movement and disposition of forces incessantly; in finality, all these have the potential for reaching a nought at the zero-hour, on the altar of the lack of the political nod. Hence, it is imperative to glean lessons from post independence wars and conflicts, on the equation of civil-military relations, and the execution of military strategy.

### **The 1962 India- China War: Misdirection**

While the complete Henderson Brooks Report on the 1962 India-China War is not available on exhibit, sufficient quantum has been placed in the open realm by the journalist Neville Maxwell. Though the report was watered in its finalisation of the terms of reference to the tactical domain, any analyst could glean the significant differences between the political hierarchy and the military establishment. These are apparent in the build-up to the war, including the diplomatic and intelligence misunderstandings on delineation of boundaries, the 'Forward Policy' of establishing posts in disputed areas and the issue of the resignation by the Chief of the Army Staff and placement of Lieutenant General BM Kaul as General Officer Commanding IV Corps, against sane military advice. As observed by Stephen Cohen, "Neither Menon nor Nehru had any military experience", yet they had "directly supervised the placement of individual brigades, companies and even platoons"<sup>5</sup>. Contextually stated, "...tactical military blunders are not produced in thin air. It requires an exceptionally incompetent political leadership that cannot link military means with political goals for that to happen. Menon's shortcomings were legion: not only was he egotistical (a fact well-known to leaders such as Maulana Azad who warned Nehru about him), he was also a micro-manager. Now, a politician is not trained in military methods."<sup>6</sup> Also that "... DCC (Defence Committee of the Cabinet) and DMC (Defence Ministers Committee) had no role in the adoption of the foredoomed 'forward policy'". As Neville Maxwell, quoting the post-war classified Military Appraisal made by Lieutenant General Henderson Brooks and Brigadier Prem Bhagat, the so-called Henderson Brooks Report, put it, "Army HQ orders on establishment of penny packet forward posts in Ladakh, specifying their locations and strength, were met with protests by Western Command that it lacked forces to carry out allotted tasks and still less to face the clearly foreseeable consequences..." adding the admonition that political decisions be based on military means. "In Arunachal Pradesh, HQ 33 Corps echoed this line equally determinedly. The Army Chief is said to have agreed with these assessments but was overruled by Krishna Menon." Responding to a press query, on the 50th anniversary of the India-China War, the Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal (ACM) NAK Browne categorically stated that the outcome of the 1962 War would have been different had the Indian Air Force (IAF) been allowed in an offensive role. Indeed, the political denial on committal of the IAF has been oft stated as having had serious repercussions on the 1962

War. This war should rightly have goaded the creation of mechanisms and enunciated military strategies, that would have facilitated the conduct of the next war, this time with Pakistan, in 1965.

### **The 1965 India-Pakistan War: Detached!**

In the 1965 India-Pakistan War, the converse to 1962 War happened. According to then Defence Minister Mr Y B Chavan's *War Diary*, published by his aide RD Pradhan, Mr Chavan gave the Army and the IAF the go-ahead to launch attacks across the ceasefire line [now the Line of Control (LC)] without consulting the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet. This account is corroborated by the then Defence Secretary PVR Rao and the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Chaudhuri. As historian Srinath Raghavan says, "The principal lesson drawn by the political and military leaders from the debacle of 1962 was to give the military a free hand in operational matters. Hence, in 1965, the politicians consciously refrained from enquiring too deeply into the actual conduct of war. This lack of adequate civilian oversight was one reason why India did not achieve a better outcome. The 'victory' in 1965 also cemented the notion that this was the best way to conduct civil-military relations, an assumption that prevails to date."

Examining the 1965 War with Pakistan, Raghavan has argued that the institutionalisation of the practice of civilian non-involvement in operational issues had deleterious consequences. First, the civilians took no part in the operational planning. Thus, the military went to war with a remarkably uninspired plan evolved solely by the General Staff. Second, the civilians restricted themselves to taking major political-military decisions (such as counter-attacking across the ceasefire line and the international border) and sought to leave the conduct of the war to the military. This proved difficult in practice, for some operational actions had direct political implications. Moreover, civilian non-involvement exacerbated the lack of coordination between the Services – a problem that originally stemmed from the absence of an effective Chiefs of Staff system. In short, the attempt to segregate the civilian and military spheres resulted in extemporised and poorly coordinated responses. Last, the politicians' refusal to involve themselves in operational matters led to an early ceasefire, which arguably precluded a more advantageous end-state for India.<sup>7</sup> At no point did the politicians engage their military advisers in any discussion of strategy – of how military means were expected to translate into the desired political ends. Prime Minister (PM) Shastri restricted

himself “to defining the war objectives of the political leadership, leaving the details of military strategy to the Army and Air Force Chiefs”. Left to himself, COAS, General Chaudhuri decided to make shallow advances on a wide front and then dig in, hoping that the enemy would wear himself down in waves of counter-attacks. “Instead of delivering a large number of inconsequential jabs, the Indian Army could perhaps have gone for a few selected, powerful thrusts... Faulty strategy led to a stalemate, with no strategic decisions whatsoever.”<sup>8</sup> In 1965, the nation was not relatively young – independent since 1947, and through two wars, the 1947-48 in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the 1962 India-China War. It is apparent that no lessons were imbibed by the political hierarchy or the bureaucracy to involve them in evolving the military strategy for the 1965 India-Pakistan War, including the desired end state. The return of Haji Pir, captured in a courageous operation, was, indeed, a monumental folly in hindsight, especially in the proxy war decades.

### **The 1971 India-Pakistan War: Limited Political Aim**

In 1971, the political sagacity of the then Prime Minister and the charismatic personality of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw prevailed on the Prime Minister not to launch operations in the month of April, for varied sound military considerations. The availability of substantial time before the war was joined allowed better coordination between the politicians and the military in evolving a strategy, and a relevant political aim translated into military strategy. With the availability of time before the war was joined, the Field Marshal's persona also prevented inter-Service differences from arising and causing discontentment. However, later day historians and war veterans have cast a spotlight on the limited political aim, which did not include the capture of Dacca! Assuredly, this creates an ambiguity on the totality of the enmeshment between the politicians and the military, and on whether the independence of Bangladesh was an aim plus achieved. The aftermath of the war, the Shimla Agreement and the release of Pakistani Prisoners of War (PoWs), could not achieve the effect that would naturally have been in India's complete favour and terminated Pakistani intransigence on J&K forever. Being victors, history remains kind to the details, and, hence, the flaws get subsumed in the post-war crowning glory.

A study of the 1971 War, indicates that the politico-bureaucratic establishment largely comprising Mr DP Dhar, head of policy planning in the Ministry of External Affairs, Mr RN Kao, chief of the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), Mr PN Haksar, the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary, and

Mr TN Kaul, the Foreign Secretary controlled the post-script. They were the key interlocutors, and, along with the PM, took all major decisions like the release of PoWs, the issue of the release of Mr Mujibur Rehman from Pakistan, the territorial issues, and the like.<sup>9</sup> The most glorifying victory was frittered away due to inadequate 'end state' deliberations. The opportunity of resolving the J&K issue was allowed to dissipate, with little involvement of the military in even an advisory role. In fact, in many a way, the glory of the armed forces was cut to size!

### **Operation Pawan: Goalless Draw!**

The 1980s witnessed serious internal strife in Sri Lanka between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the other Tamil militant groups. The LTTE sought to establish an independent Tamil Eelam, while the Sri Lankan government was resolute in protecting the country's territorial integrity. India aspired for devolution of power to the Tamil-inhabited areas and negotiate a compromise. The Indian armed forces were involved in this strife from 1987 onwards. The most important lesson to be learnt from the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka is the imperative of defining the mission unambiguously.<sup>10</sup> It is essential to understand that any country will have only limited resources and political will to expend beyond its shores, given that neither national survival nor loss of national territory is likely to be at stake in contingencies involving external intervention. Given this limitation, arriving at clearly defined and limited goals is essential for success.<sup>11</sup> The idea of an Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) was envisaged in the accord only as a possible contingency to be deployed "if so required" to "guarantee and enforce the cessation of hostilities".<sup>12</sup> A scathing reference to the political nonchalance in devising the political aims and missions is by the force commander, stating that "...the directive issued by the Indian Government to the first Overall Force Commander (OFC) of the IPKF was 'delightfully vague', directing him as it did to 'implement the Accord'".<sup>13</sup>

Even as the Indian government decided upon the option of using force to coerce the LTTE into honouring the India-Sri Lanka agreement, the latter launched their first direct military attack on the IPKF. The IPKF's role then became transformed from that of peace-keeping to one of combating the LTTE. Indian political leaders were confused about how to deal with the LTTE. In late November 1987, Defence Minister KC Pant declared in the Parliament that India "had no desire to hurt the LTTE". The lesson that emerges from this

narrative is the imperative of developing a clear mandate for such operations. An integral part of a mandate is the crafting of an exit strategy that provides for a pull-out once the mandate has been fulfilled. A fundamental prerequisite for charting such a clear mandate is political wisdom on what is practically achievable and recognition of the limits of military power.<sup>14</sup> Operation Pawan is, hence, a significant chapter in the study of civil-military relations post independence. Inevitably, it highlights lack of imagination, vision and foresight in involvement in an operation that was to cause consternation in both civil and military establishments, and that led to an inglorious exit later.

### **The 1999 Kargil War: Severe Restrictions**

The state of the Army in the Kargil War, is best described by the Chief of Army Staff, General VP Malik in the statement, “We shall fight with whatever we have,” which bespoke volumes on the state of the Army. Again, in a potent disclosure General VP Malik stated that the Indian Army was “...all set to enter the Pakistan-occupied territory in 1999, but they were stopped by the PM...”<sup>15</sup> The Army, though prepared to expand the war on the western sector, was obviously restricted. Initially, the IAF was restricted only to logistics and aerial reconnaissance roles. On May 26, 1999, the IAF was given the go-ahead to strike enemy positions..., but was not allowed to cross the LC, thus, seriously curtailing the freedom to employ air power in a classic manner. 20 X 20 km area is a very small area for an Air Force to operate.<sup>16</sup> The aftermath of the Kargil War exhibited the understanding of the crying need for institutionalising a conjoined civil-military mechanism for evolving military strategy, by ordering a review of the entire national security system, to analyse lacunae and corrective needs. The Group of Ministers (GoM) formed subsequently to study the Kargil Review Committee Report lamented that “the inherited system was neither adequate nor any longer suitable to meet India’s security needs.” The Kargil War and its conduct clearly brought out significant lessons on the political compulsions that can impose the severest of restrictions on prosecution of the military strategy. Detailed plans and training can go singularly awry, on the altar of non-involvement of the government in the planning processes, wilfully or otherwise.

### **Operation Parakram: Coercive Diplomacy?**

The military mobilisation that was initiated by the Indian armed forces responding to a terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001,



(during which twelve people, including the five men who attacked the building, were killed), was called Operation Parakram. In the Western media, coverage of the standoff focussed on the possibility of a nuclear war between the two countries and the implications of the potential conflict on the American-led “Global War on Terrorism” in Afghanistan. This show of force by India, it was believed, would compel Rawalpindi – the Pakistan Army General Headquarters (GHQ) – to change course and desist from supporting terror groups.<sup>17</sup> At the height of Operation Parakram, India and Pakistan had amassed almost 800,000 troops in the proximity of the LC and the military tension – which included missile tests – was palpable. Predictably, Pakistan alluded to its nuclear weapon capability to stoke international anxiety.

As an event, the operation as a measure of coercive diplomacy has been studied intensely. Admiral Sushil Kumar, former Chief of the Naval Staff categorically stated that *“there was no aim or military objective for Operation Parakram. I don’t mind admitting that it was the most punishing mistake for the Indian Armed Forces”*<sup>18</sup> Most experts aver that Parakram was imprecisely conceived, and that there was no clear political objective to the mass mobilisation<sup>19</sup>. The most potent comment on the why and wherefore of Operation Parakram, is by Mr Jaswant Singh, then the Minister of External Affairs and a member of the Cabinet Committee on Security, in mentioning the challenge in convincing the three Service Chiefs to recognise ‘restraint’ as a strategic asset, for avoiding conflict. “The chiefs so wanted a chance, ‘to have a crack’ as the military put it...”<sup>20</sup>

A ten-month military standoff, as a measure of coercive diplomacy, in which, there were apparent differences of opinion between the Service Chiefs and the polity rightfully brings to fore the preeminence of civilian superiority over the military in a democracy – especially one as vibrant as that of India. The study of Operation Parakram on the evolutionary processes of military strategy exhibits that this manner is certainly not the best course for the execution of operations.

### **Civilian Control of Military Strategy**

In a democracy, like a thriving one that India is, civilian control, that is, by elected representatives of the people, is the absolute imperative. Civilian control allows a nation to base its values, institutions, and practices on the popular will rather than on the choices of military leaders, whose outlook by definition focusses on the need for internal order and external security. The military is, by necessity,

among the least democratic institutions in human experience; martial customs and procedures clash by nature with individual freedom and civil liberty, the highest values in democratic societies.<sup>21</sup> It has been put across in a distinct and pointed framework that “the principle of civilian supremacy means not only carrying out the policy directives of civilian authorities, *but also refraining from preempting them*. By discussing in public, questions of force or when and how to deploy it, Generals can preempt their leaders or vitiate policy choices.”<sup>22</sup> Again, if military strategy is the compounding of ideas to be implemented by military organisations to pursue desired strategic goals, then how can the strategy be formulated in a vacuum?

The ongoing discourse for a number of decades on civil-military relations, commences with all force in the argument on the creation or otherwise of the Chief of Defence Staff and, of late, of Theatre Commands! Civilian control over the military in India is addressed in multifarious ways presently, totally in matters of acquisitions and procurement, from approval of acceptance of necessity, in control on finances, on structuring, on promotional and human resource issues, and the like. On the contrary, this vice-like control that is exercised on these aspects compares most unfavourably with the involvement in matters of military strategy. While rightly accepting the competence of the Services on operational issues, the avoidance in the setting of strategic goals and vision for the military creates a strange void.

### **Civilian Control: Elected Representatives and/or Bureaucracy?**

On the involvement of politicians in military issues, it has been stated that “the Indian politician, in spite of his strident emphasis on the principle of civil control, keeps his distance from the military and delegates the responsibility for security related matters to civil servants or technocrats.”<sup>23</sup> Again, on similar lines, “The Indian politician is intuitively aware that there are serious flaws in the national security structure, but political survival remains his first priority. His comfort level with the bureaucrat being high, he is happy to leave the management of defence and security matters in his hands.”<sup>24</sup>

Bureaucracies frequently become tools or even contenders in the internal struggle to control policy and strategy. Because they are more interested in the process than in the solutions, overly powerful bureaucracies tend to build strategies that aim to institutionalise a crisis rather than to end it. Both thought and action can grind to a halt as innumerable bureaucrats strain to get a piece of every decision.<sup>25</sup> “The military, as its intrinsic character, is

expected to possess the ability to assert itself, and this creates a behavioural peculiarity within the armed forces. The attitude grows from a lifetime of accomplishing a mission, regardless of the costs or methods and means. As opposed to this, the civilian counterparts are expected to implement policies without any cause for confrontation or conflict. 'Assertion', which is an intrinsic military characteristic, is alien to this democratic construct. It is, therefore, obvious that the political vector has shown preference for a layer of civilian bureaucracy between them and the military. This is the default position of the structure. In terms of any civil-military structure we cannot ignore this reality notwithstanding other factors of competence and specialisation."<sup>26</sup> Inevitably, hence, the control that stands exercised by the government, is largely in effect, the bureaucracy, and, to a much lesser extent, the elected representatives, especially as far as creation of military strategy is concerned.

### **The Making of Indian Military Strategy**

Inevitably, the evolution of military strategy comprises two-way traffic between the government and the military professionals, in which, in a democratic dispensation like ours, the final call will rest with the government. As has been argued earlier, the conduct of a military campaign will always remain for political ends. As a corollary, the government and the military conjointly have to be accountable to the populace on the success or otherwise of the military strategy, in retrospective. It is relevant to mention that there may be many military strategies, based on threats and challenges, changing precepts of warfare, ongoing situation, for example, in combating insurgencies and terrorism. Many a military strategy would be based on futuristic scenarios, enmeshed with the grand strategy or national security strategy that cumulates utilisation of national power holistically, and may last a considerable period of time. War-fighting strategies would have a reasonable failure rate or achieve less than the envisaged end state. The latter requires in-depth analysis on revisitation, to repeat known pitfalls. Thus, military strategy—not in the operational sense but in the sense we have described of determining how military means relate to political ends—is a civilian responsibility. The duty of military leaders is to see that political leaders do not fail because they were poorly advised or poorly served by soldiers. Politics creates war, so success or failure in war is ultimately the responsibility of the political leadership.<sup>27</sup>

### **Strategic Guidance to Military Strategy**

Military strategy envisages employment of all of a nation's military capabilities at the highest of levels, and long-term planning, development and procurement to assure victory or success. If not enunciated by the political establishment in peace, and if not planned, developed, trained for, or force created in peace, then inadequacies in the achievement of political aims during war will rest with the civil-military peace-time imbroglio. More fundamentally, the notion of a separate operational domain simply does not survive contact with reality. Strategic history is amply populated with cases of soldiers being given impossible tasks by policy-makers and of soldiers compelled to operate in the absence of clear political guidance.<sup>28</sup>

Hence, to argue further, military strategy is derived from the political formulation of national aims, vision and interests, implying dominant importance of political ends. It is apparent that the national security policy would be the bedrock to lead on to the development of a military strategy. Again, the military strategy cannot be viewed in isolation, as in the prosecution of a national security policy, the military is an instrument, along with other parameters of national power – diplomacy, economic leverages, political strength and will – cumulated with soft power. Being a singular component of hard power, military power applies forces, threatens to do so, or becomes an instrument for deterring war.

This conceptualisation denotes the creation of a military strategy with sufficient forethought and analysis, and not exactly in the heat of the battle, to achieve the ends, with the means at hand, in ways or concepts of employment as pre-decided. Paraphrasing it, military strategy becomes a plan that signifies utilisation of means and concepts of employment of the military to achieve political ends. If prevention of war is the reigning theme of military power, then it has to be proven by enunciation of military doctrines and concepts, creating the requisite military capabilities to operationalise the concepts, and to train or exercise in a composite manner to attain the military aims –which would have been gleaned from the political ends. The cherry on the cake is the perceptible political (and national) will and commitment to order execution of the military plans. The latter is also part of a psychological, a mind game. In this formulation, it is apparent that the political dynamism is part and parcel of the national security apparatus and peace-time planning process for evolving the military strategy. Any cleavage in this is bound to be evident by the hesitancy in the committal of military

power when need be, or in stipulating grave restrictions that would shackle the military in optimal utilisation of its power.

### **Evolution of Military Strategy: A Reality Check**

It is unfortunate that even after four full-fledged wars, one border war and a plethora of counter-insurgency operations, in which the armed forces have distinguished themselves with their valour and sacrifices, India has been unable to evolve comprehensive strategies for optimally using the military and other components of national power.<sup>29</sup> Clausewitz insists that politicians must understand the military instrument that they intend to use, but in historical practice, that has been an exceptional condition, not the norm.<sup>30</sup> India is in a dire neighbourhood, with an active border with Pakistan, and an undemarcated one with China. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) portends of an arena that behoves for capabilities to stand firm under grave provocation. The standing affirmation of 'short intense wars' if any, notwithstanding, even the assurance of conventional deterrence against traditional adversaries demands a military strategy blessed by the government.

Contextually, hence, the question arises whether the doctrines enunciated by the three Services in India and the joint Services one, have been prepared conjointly with the government, have the government's stamp of approval or clearly rest on an articulated national security strategy. In any case, doctrines do not focus on 'ends', and are basically written concepts, sans physical outcomes, which is the domain of strategies. While a formalised national security strategy may not be available, enough pronouncements, even in the Parliament, provide some direction. The making of a military strategy is a complex bureaucratic process – the bureaucracies of the civilian realm and the military. The three Services have distinct separated cultures, ideals, organisations and capabilities. The Services also tend to enhance their own tools and solutions, and develop doctrines that promote their own interests. Invariably, the bureaucracy considers the military as too rigid, hawkish, a little too offensive-minded and with unrealistic plans. The Services too, therefore, have to adjust their philosophies in accordance with the political vision.

Existentially, the National Security Council (NSC) of India is a three-tiered organisation that oversees political, economic, energy and security issues of strategic concern. It operates within the executive office of the Prime Minister of India, liaising between the government's executive branch and the intelligence services, advising the leadership on intelligence and security issues. The NSC

comprises the Strategic Policy Group (SPG), National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and a Secretariat from the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). The National Security Adviser (NSA) presides over the NSC, and is also the primary adviser to the Prime Minister. The National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), which is under the NSA, has an agenda that includes issues of external and internal security, military affairs, conventional and non-conventional defence, space and high technology, counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, the economy and the environment.

The military has limited representation in the high tiers of national security management. There used to be a Director General Defence Planning in the Cabinet Secretariat, but was subsumed in the HQ Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) on its creation. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) oversees the functioning of the Services HQ in form, though there is no formalised mechanism for the contemplation and formulation of military strategy, based on scenarios or trends and drivers. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), in its organisation, has developed the Border Management, Internal Security, Left Wing Extremism and Northeast Divisions which are tasked on prospective planning and routine management. These divisions do have sporadic and issue-based interaction with other organs of the government. The obvious implication is a paucity of synergy in the government on matters of national security and, more specifically, on the evolution of a military strategy. There are pitfalls, hence, in the existential system as it leads to adhocism, without formal structures that prognosticate to closeness of the future course, evolve the relevant strategies in due consultative processes with the relevant Cabinet sub-committees and allow for translation into the 'ways' and 'means'.

A case in point could be the famed Cold Start or proactive strategy, for which the Army has been training wholeheartedly, on whether it has governmental approval or backing. Undoubtedly, the answer should be in the affirmative, with the stupendous exertions of the Services over the last dozen odd years. To singularly revise it or constrain it when the idiomatic 'balloon goes up' could jinx well perfected plans. Again, on the enunciated strategy rests the capability creation, which entails large acquisitions and force structuring. The military may be preparing for the wrong war, one not subscribed by political objectives.

### **Making of the Military Strategy: Structures**

"In theory, foreign policy determines military strategy...Reality is rarely so simple."<sup>31</sup> The formulation of a military strategy is a complex bureaucratic-

military decision-making process, relating political goals on contingencies or scenarios into military objectives. In this strategy, the devil lies in the details. The Clausewitzian ‘friction in war’, the notion of uncertainty and chance has to be catered for. There is the necessity to possess standing mechanisms that formulate and plan application of the strategy, and constantly review, reassess and provide guidelines to further hone the military strategy, as is considered obligatory. With an annual defence budget of nearly \$ 53 billion, which is nearly 13 percent of the total government expenditure, it is imperative that the oversight to its expenditure is guided under an enunciated military strategy – albeit may not be in entirety in the public domain. It is axiomatic in this context that specialist structures within the larger ambit of the political-bureaucratic sphere of influence exist to partake in the creation of the military strategy.

Presently, the control over the Services is exercised through procedures, financial control and in the Services’ appointments at the highest levels. The nation expects the armed forces to extend the range of options rather than constrict them. A standardised mechanism for ‘hot situations’ management and policy-making is essential in permanence. Hence, with the future being so uncertain, there is a crying need to create an action plan:

- Institutionalise formalised methodologies, akin to the National Institution for Transforming India – the NITI Aayog. The envisaged structure should have the mandate to create the synergies and evolve strategies that should lead on to a formalised military strategy. An expanded and tailored NSCS, having a Deputy NSA (Military), headed by a serving or retired Lieutenant General or equivalent, with a Operations and Perspective Plans Division, should undertake the role, devolving the responsibility for conceptualising the military strategy on the NSA. Links with the Operations Directorates of the Integrated Defence Staff, and the Services will have to be established.
- The political vision should formally be dovetailed into finding answers to intransigent and vexed issues, as also dictate the larger picture for the military on expectations of the end state in conventional conflict or in pursuance of counter-insurgency strategies. In this context, a biennial position paper as strategic guidelines after the enunciation of the strategy will be advantageous in remaining current, and have continuous inputs and database.
- The MoD, the premier ministry tasked with formalising the military strategy, needs to create a division for operational and perspective plans

that becomes the receptacle of information and analysis, and to evolve the same. Naturally, the structure must have components from the three Services, but should function under the Defence Secretary.

- All acquisitions thereafter must be based on the capability attainment plan prepared based on the military strategy. In fact, the larger exercises to be held in validation of the military strategy must be vetted by this division to be in conformity of the broader vision manifested. This will assure the credibility of the exercise as one that has been sanctified for implementation, once the balloon goes up.
- With the prospective National Defence University, the research system can find a permanent establishment of merit.

### Conclusion

The conflict and tension in civil–military relations are neatly captured in a pair of rival maxims: first, “war is too important to be left to the Generals”; and second, “war is too important to be left to the politicians”.<sup>32</sup> We believe that civil–military relations in India have focussed too heavily on one side of the problem – how to ensure civilian control over the armed forces, while neglecting the other – how to build and field an effective military force. This imbalance in civil–military relations has caused military modernisation and reforms to suffer from a lack of political guidance, disunity of purpose and effort and material, and intellectual corruption.<sup>33</sup> It is relevant to examine the official position on the principle of the use of force. Civilian control has special significance today. For mature democracies, where civilian control has historically been strong, and military establishments have focussed on external defence, the test is whether civilians can exercise supremacy in military policy and decision-making—that is, frame the alternatives and define the discussion, as well as make the final choice. After the military strategy has been enunciated, and “while the operational directive is laid down by the political leadership, the actual planning of operations is left to the Chiefs of Staff, and, over the years, a convention has been established that in purely operational matters such advice of the chiefs is almost automatically accepted.”<sup>34</sup>

Among the oldest problems of human governance has been that of securing the subordination of military forces to political authority.<sup>35</sup> For mature democracies, where civilian control has historically been strong and military establishments have focussed on external defence, the test is whether civilians



can exercise supremacy in military policy and decision-making—that is, frame the alternatives and define the discussion, as well as make the final choice. For democracy, civilian control—that is, control of the military by civilian officials elected by the people—is fundamental. Civilian control allows a nation to base its values, institutions, and practices on the popular will rather than on the choices of military leaders, whose outlook by definition focusses on the need for internal order and external security.<sup>36</sup>

The making of a military strategy cannot be taken in a casual file-pushing routine exercise between the bureaucracies at both civil and military levels. This cannot be so. The systems created must envisage the creation of a database, constant acquisition of intelligence, to standardise the process of making the strategy, and the follow-up. The nation is still smarting from the aftermath of the 1962 War! In this process, there will be dithering in pinning down the establishment to be categorical, for that is its wont. Yet, even at the risk of repetition, nearly \$ 53 billion cannot be spent on defence by a developing nation, which also has serious internal and external security concerns, without a formalised military security strategy. The complexities of the strategic environment and the envisioning of future wars demand it; there are very high stakes in it. Or, the current plans and the end state envisioned and trained for in isolation by the Services, may not find favour with the political hierarchy, and dilution at that juncture may be severely detrimental. Civil-military relations as a routine functioning of the Services are vital for the nation and the military. Civil-military relations in evolving and constantly refining the military strategy are critical for India, in the complex geostrategic environment that the nation faces.

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