

OUT OF AREA OPERATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In the early hours of 03 Nov 1988, 55,000 residents of Male (the capital of Maldives) awoke to the reality of an armed coup, hearing gunshots all round for the first time in their lives. Till then the Maldivians had hardly ever witnessed crime leave aside violence (unlike now). The last murder in this island nation was reported in 1976 and that too of a German murdering his girlfriend and the one before that was way back in 1793. In the Nov 1988 coup, Abdullah Luthufi a rich businessman with the help of mercenaries from the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) had taken over the island nation, capturing the Radio and TV stations and the presidential palace. Mr Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the President since 1978, who had been returned to power with a 98.5% majority for the third time was scheduled to visit India on 02/03 Nov 1988, prior to his oath taking ceremony on 11 Nov. On learning of the coup, the President went into hiding, taking shelter in a safe house in the capital island of Male. The 1500 strong National Security Service (NSS) whose Headquarter is located adjacent to the Presidential Palace was besieged by the mercenaries, who fortunately failed to enter and take over the armoury. Complicity of a few NSS Cadres was never ruled out. President Gayoom from a safe house requested assistance first from the US followed by the Soviets and thereafter Pakistan to rescue him. The US base at Diego Garcia was the nearest located 1175 kms away, but it was election year for the US with the Presidential elections scheduled for the 8th of November. Not having received a positive response from the three nations, President Gayoom requested India for assistance.¹ The Government of India acceded to the request and launched an OOA operation in Maldives codenamed OP CACTUS LILY.

The task was specific, **“To rescue the President of Maldives and escort him safely to India”**. The operations launched from a cold start and executed with surgical precision was successfully accomplished within 16 hours of the first indication of an impending operation. President MA Gayoom was rescued. The coup leaders and rebels were handed over to the Maldivian authorities. On 03 Apr 1989, TIME magazine ran a cover story “Super Power Rising” stating “India asserts its place on the world stage.”²

Historically India's experience in OOA operations have been wide ranging. It commenced soon after Independence with the military deployment as part of the Custodian Force in Korea in 1953. More recent are assistance to friendly countries - OP PAWAN in Sri Lanka in 1987, and OP CACTUS LILY in 1988 in Maldives. Evacuation of Indians has been undertaken from various conflict-ridden areas; Kuwait and Iraq 1990, Libya 2011, Yemen 2015, Sudan 2016. India's armed forces have undertaken HADR operations out of area frequently. Most extensive though is the OOA experience in UN peacekeeping operations, where India is amongst the largest contributors.

Addressing the Combined Commanders Conference on 26 October 2004, **Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said, “Our strategic footprint covers the region bounded by the Horn of Africa, West Asia, Central Asia, South-East Asia and beyond, to the far reaches**

¹ Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia (Retd), CENJOWS Synodos Paper Vol – XII No 2/ Feb 2018.

² Ibid.

of the Indian Ocean. Awareness of this reality should inform and animate our strategic thinking and defence planning.”³

A decade plus later at the Combined Commanders Conference on 15 Dec 2015 on board INS Vikramaditya at Sea, **Prime Minister Modi said: “In an inter-dependent world, India’s transformation is closely linked with our international partnerships. And, so is our security.”** Elucidating the compass of National Security, he highlighted: **“Across the world, India is seen not just as a new bright spot of the global economy. It is also seen as an anchor for regional and global peace, security and stability. As our security horizons and responsibilities extend beyond our shores and borders, we must prepare our forces for range and mobility”.**⁴

India has recently become the world’s sixth largest economy, surpassing France. It is expected to be one of the top three economic powers of the World over the next 10-15 years. Addressing the World Economic Forum, on 23 Jan 2018, Prime Minister Modi announced that India is capable of building a \$5 trillion-dollar economy by 2025. Concomitant to the intensifying vibrancy in economy is the growing need for resources, particularly energy. India’s markets and investments abroad, and the diaspora overseas are also increasing at a rapid pace.

It is important to emphasise that a strong economy needs to be undergirded by strong security. It is also important to note that increasingly the World community expects India to be the net provider of security in the Indian Ocean Region. **The compass of the Nation’s security, is no longer restricted to our land boundaries or coast lines or for that matter the immediate neighbourhood.**

One of the National Security objectives highlighted in the Joint Doctrine of Indian Armed Forces published on 18 Apr 2017 is: “Expand and strengthen “Constructive Engagement” with other Nations to promote regional, global peace and international stability.” In the joint doctrine, the related national military objective has been articulated as: “Be prepared for contingencies at home and abroad to render Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Aid to Civil Authority and International Peacekeeping, when called upon to do so.”

OOA CHALLENGES TO NATIONAL SECURITY

Challenges to National Security that may involve an OOA operation are manifold and evolving. At a basic level is security of the large Indian diaspora across the world, particularly in conflict prone areas. Security of Indian investment/assets could also be vulnerable in conflict-ridden areas. Growing religious radicalism, be it in West Asia, Africa, Pakistan, Indonesia, Afghanistan could have serious influence on India’s security. Keeping the large Indian Muslim population insulated to these happenings, and preventing an adverse impact on the secular fabric and the security environment in the country is a major challenge.

Further the ongoing conflicts in West Asia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria or Africa, have implications on the security of India. These regions are rich in energy resources and India is dependent on West Asia for bulk of its oil imports. Secure flow of energy resources is critical for the future growth and development of India. Central Asian Republics, owing to their geo-strategic

³ <https://archivepmo.nic.in/drmanmohansingh/speech-details.php?nodeid=1067> accessed 15 July 2018.

⁴ <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=133265> accessed 8 Aug 2018.

location, promise of natural resources and scope of foreign investments are important for India. Likewise, Afghanistan is critical to India's interests. Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in India's neighbourhood has direct implications on India. Of particular significance is the possibility of renegade states and non-state actors gaining access to WMD. This would have serious ramifications in case they reach terrorists/jihadi elements operating against India. Rise of international terrorism, piracy and attempts to undermine state control and threaten innocent citizens through random acts of violence in the high seas or global commons is a cause of concern. Combating foreign sponsored terrorism is likely to remain the principal challenge to democratic societies and occupy centre stage in both the national and international security perspectives.

Natural calamities are common challenges requiring international response creating OOA contingencies for application of India's civil and military resources. Effects of climate change are also manifesting increasingly as in flash floods, cloud bursts, sea level rise etc. When such calamities occur in the countries in our region it would be expected of India to respond. At another level, systemic impacts of climate change are likely to place greater pressure on water and food security requiring collective international response.

OOA OPERATIONS – THE REMARKABLE TRINITY

The capability for OOA operations comes from the Clausewitzian "remarkable trinity" of the government, armed services, and people. It is determined by the ability to synergise National effort, both civil and military. **OOA requires a 'whole of government plus' approach.** It would involve the Prime Minister's Office, National Security Advisor, Ministries of External Affairs, Defence, Home Affairs, Shipping and Transport, Civil Aviation, Health and so on. The armed forces, Central Armed Police Forces, Air India and other commercial airlines, merchant shipping have a major role to play.

We have had several situations in which Indians have been evacuated from conflict ridden areas. **In countries or areas where the Indian diaspora is potentially threatened, people's involvement in dealing with such an eventuality is important.** Quite evidently the people and the Indian community will have to respond first in a security crisis. Developing community spirit, leading to emergency drills and Dos and Don'ts for the community are essential. **In potentially conflict-ridden areas people's volunteers force needs to be organised to act as first responders** to be able to hold and/or contain the situation with the help of local security forces, till the OOA force gets effective.

LIKELY CONTINGENCIES FOR OOA OPERATIONS

There could be several contingencies in our response to the OOA challenges to national security. Additionally, they may arise as part of agreed international commitments. Some of these are given below: -

- Protection of lives and property of Indian citizens overseas against war, terror and other threats.
- Assure security to Indian investments overseas.
- Ensure security of routes of communication and enable free flow of resources (particularly energy) and trade.
- Provide assistance to friendly foreign countries against threats from inimical elements.
- Engage in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations in friendly foreign countries.

- Military diplomacy activity including joint exercises.
- UN mission.

Security of Indian Diaspora and Assets Overseas: Any serious threat to security of the Indian diaspora and their property and Indian citizens engaged in various development or other business activities may require the Government of India to undertake evacuation operations. The situation could well manifest in Indian nationals being taken as hostage by pirates /terrorist outfits or such like situations.

Protection of Indian Economic Assets Overseas: India's economic assets across the globe are increasing, with corresponding security requirements particularly in conflict ridden areas. There is a need to have capability for rapid response in the event of an attack or an imminent threat on our assets. Security and protection of assets overseas from inimical elements may also require a request for intervention and/or a credible military response.

Assistance to Friendly Foreign Governments: Fundamentalist or such like groups may threaten Government in smaller friendly states in our neighbourhood. In the event of a request and/or Government of India deciding to step in to provide security, a military response may be necessary either independently or as part of an international force. This may be in the form of **Intervention Operations** to overthrow rogue/inimical elements threatening friendly Government. In disputed/conflict affected areas it could be under the UN Charter or other international agreements.

Human Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR): In view of the likely effects of climate change and particular vulnerability of the Asian plate to natural disasters of varied types, eg earthquakes, tsunami, cyclones etc, India may be called upon to undertake humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations in the affected countries. HADR typically requires rescue and relief operations, casualty evacuation and emergency medical aid, and restoration of essential services. Prophylactic security operations for the protection of personnel and resources from inimical elements may have to be undertaken concomitantly with HADR at times.

Security of Routes of Communications: India's growing energy needs will increasingly require security for unimpeded access to energy and safe passage particularly along the vulnerable choke points in international waters.

Security of Resources: In our race for scarce resources to enable unhindered growth of our economy, potential competitors may attempt to undermine our interests through multiple means. In extreme circumstances this may even require military response.

Force Projection/ Expeditionary Tasks: India's strategic disposition juxtaposed with its growing political and economic stature in the world, may make it necessary and require capability to carry out credible force projection, to establish and affirm our national objectives. This may involve despatch of forces to protect and further National interests. The composition and capability of this force would be dictated by the objectives of the mission to be executed.

OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The operational environment in OOA operations would vary depending upon circumstances.

Intelligence

Given the very nature and multiplicity of contingencies in OOA operations, forces have to be prepared to operate in an environment of intelligence void. This could ab-initio place the forces on a back foot. Even basic requirements such as terrain, town maps, interpreters, and local contacts may be at premium. It is therefore imperative that possible OOA contingencies be visualised and mobilisation and execution exercises conducted periodically to condition potential participants. In addition, participants need to quickly adapt themselves to the situation and have flexibility inherent in their plans.

Synergy Between Civil and Military Components of Own and Host Nation

OOA contingencies invariably have associated sensitivity. The decision-making process is likely to be far more complex, and characterised by lack of clarity at the conceptual and directional level. Further, the diplomatic/political nature of these operations may force restrictive rules of engagement. While this may be detrimental to the conduct of operations, but is a reality which has to be contended with.

Availability of Resource

The gap between resources available and those desired in terms of forces, equipment and training, may require compromises. However, certain optimum force levels will have to be arrived at by good contingency planning and exercises to prepare for such eventualities.

Availability of Specialists

Past experience indicates need for professionals such as interpreters, experts in handling civil affairs and humanitarian activities etc. It is important to identify pool of experts and co-opt them in exercises promote understanding, cooperation and save time in criticality.

Strategic Lift Capability Civil and Military

Success of any OOA operations depends on the logistics of moving men and material, quickly and successfully over large distances. National capability both civil and military in terms of strategic and tactical mobility has been enhanced significantly in the recent past. Joint exercise amongst the services, would be essential to optimise the capability.

CONDUCT OF OPERATIONS

The likely stages in OOA operations are as given below: -

Early Entry

The success of OOA operations hinges on the ability to ensure an early entry in the area of intended operations. To facilitate an early entry, the force earmarked has to be quickly mobilized and transported to the intended area. Since the force is vulnerable at this stage; adequate protection needs to be catered to.

Deployment and Consolidation

After the early entry has been executed and minimum requirement of infrastructure catered to, the follow-on forces would be deployed. Thereafter, the operational area needs to be consolidated. This may even involve launching of military operations to capture or establish control over key areas.

Stabilization

Once consolidation has taken place, the process of stabilization must commence. This includes peace, stability and security operations. These operations are uncertain and complex with a potential to turn violent. This phase of operations has a tendency to get prolonged.

End State and Exit Strategy

The desired end state and exit strategy needs to be thought through at the highest level at the beginning of OOA operations. The exit strategy needs to be reviewed basis situation on the ground and in keeping with the strategic aim and objectives. Having achieved the National goals, an early exit strategy is always desirable.

Rules of Engagement

Rules of engagement will be guidelines for troops, as to how military force will be employed in the field. Capability generated must be in sync with some broad principles of the likely missions and rules of engagement envisaged.

CAPABILITY REQUIRED FOR CONDUCT OF OPERATIONS

Specifically, for the armed forces, they need to develop capability, under joint command and control structure. The required capabilities are elucidated in succeeding paras.

Entry Force

There should be a capability to insert an entry force early, which is credible in strength, joint in character, with a stable command and control structure. It should be capable of entry by either sea or air. This force would be like the “vanguard force”. In case of intervention operations, it should be grouped with additional SF units. Keeping in view our geo strategic location and likely employment scenarios this force should be capable of deployment in 24-48 hrs from the time of decision.

Once on the ground, the early entry force should be capable of securing critical facilities/ terrain and set the stage for deployment of main force.

To enable a timely response for unforeseen emergencies, the early entry force, along with the required lift capability, should be earmarked and trained jointly under the aegis of the HQ Integrated Defence Staff.

Main Force

The main force should be capable of exploiting the gains made by the early entry force and progress operations further to achieve the objectives of the mission. The main force should

be capable of securing threatened islands, seize an air-head or capture value objectives critical to furthering operations, in conjunction with the early force or independently in a complementary area. Capability of the main force should be as elucidated below: -

- **Air Component.** Air Force will have to play a significant role in OOA operations, as it has the attributes to respond rapidly with fire power and mobility to address any OOA contingency. It has immense power projection capabilities in terms of long range strike capability, precision munitions, real time intelligence etc. Capability to air-lift / transport the complete complement in minimum number of waves is essential. Post insertion adequate heli-lift capability is required for the force including integral fire support, combat service and logistics support. Aero medical and evacuation capability would be required in contingencies. Air force resources will need to be augmented by civil aviation assets.
- **Maritime Component.** OOA force should have an amphibious capability with necessary shipping assets to include landing and logistic ships for being self-sufficient for sustained operations. Navy should be able to control the maritime threat at the selected point of entry and exit. In case of evacuation operations, shipping assets should be able to facilitate transportation of people. Indian Navy should be capable of protecting India's mercantile marine and sea-borne trade by ensuring security of shipping routes, particularly vulnerable choke points. In the larger context, Indian Navy should be able to gain confidence of IOR littorals and employ naval capability as an effective instrument of India's foreign policy by generating goodwill and safe guarding Indian economic interests through maritime diplomacy.
- **Land Component:** The formation must have the capability to conduct independent operations or in support of the other formations. Based on the mission, time and area permitting, its fire power and manoeuvre capability must be augmented by mechanised infantry and / or light armour (capable of air/ sea lift). Adequate integral fire support is necessary to be able to undertake operations even when air/ naval gun fire/ arty fire is not in range. Special Forces, inter-service in composition with the capability to launch precise offensive operations is required. Apart from the strategic lift capability, on entry the troops should have the capability to move cross country as well as on existing roads and tracks with some protection from small arms fire, mortar and IED. During OOA operations facilities such as ports or air fields, would be required for insertion of forces. The force should incorporate engineering expertise in repair of ports, air fields, bridges. Engineer support for 'Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Operations' will need to be catered as required.
- **Police Component:** Most OOA contingencies involve situations where civilians, foreign and Indian are affected. Management of civilians particularly in distress situations should be undertaken by civil police. In addition, there are certain assets which have central armed police forces deployed for security. OOA forces need to therefore factor components that will provide liaison and communication with deployed assets.

Intelligence and Surveillance

Domain awareness needs to be given due importance. Aspects of collection and constant updating of information and surveillance needs to be a routine activity basis the contingencies visualised. Efforts of multiple agencies need to be coordinated by defined mechanisms that meet periodically. OOA Force HQ must have integral intelligence and surveillance component which specializes in the acquisition and analysis of information of potential value. It should be

rapidly deployable, with the capability of carrying out advanced intelligence analysis, collection, counter intelligence and long-range surveillance. It should therefore provide a multiple source, predictive intelligence support to OOA operations.

NBC Capability

Though nuclear threat may be remote, an attack by chemical, biological weapons or a radiation leakage cannot be ruled out. In case of renegade states, OOA operations may be fought in the back drop of nuclear, biological and chemical warfare (NBC). Therefore, OOA force should be capable to operate in a NBC environment. This will require reserves of protective clothing, detection and decontamination equipment.

Logistics

The logistics organization should be capable of providing sustained logistic support during all phases of operations, as also integrate civil and military infrastructure in the country where operations are being conducted. The nature of OOA operations suggest the need for integrated logistics co-opting civil and military resources. The organization should have the capability to replenish the front lines by air, helicopter, land or sea.

Medical

Since the OOA force will be employed in areas where adequate medical facilities may not exist, they should have capability to treat casualties, including lifesaving surgeries. Ship based hospital or land based medical and surgical facilities may have to be set up. In case of disaster relief operations, the medical capabilities would have to be enhanced and separately worked on a brick system as per the anticipated casualties.

Media

The importance of media interaction to build positive perception of the operations needs emphasis at all times including preparatory exercises. The OOA force must be staffed and equipped to engage with local, national and international media.

Human Rights (HR)

Along with a media cell there is a need to incorporate a HR section, which advises on aspects related to human rights, and undertakes prophylactic measures to prevent any HR violations or even allegations of the same. This is particularly pertinent in an international environment as it would provide greater credibility to the operations.

CONCLUSION

The capability for OOA operations comes from the Clausewitzian "remarkable trinity" of the government, armed services, and people. It requires a 'whole of government plus' outlook. In several contingencies, the Indian diaspora is potentially threatened, therefore developing community spirit, emergency drills and Dos and Don'ts for the community are essential. In such contingencies, **people's volunteers force needs to be organised to act as first responders** to be able to hold and/or contain the situation with the help of local

security forces, till the OOA force gets effective. **The armed forces, Central Armed Police Forces, Air India and other commercial airliners, merchant shipping have a major role to play.**

Very high degree of synergy amongst agencies within the country, host Nation and other cooperating Nations is imperative. To cater to emergencies, an institutionalized mechanism needs to be established at the National level to deal with such situations as indeed rehearse for them.

In summary, out of area capability is an essential element of comprehensive national power. It needs to be developed in line with National Security Aspirations outlined by successive Prime Ministers of India.