

Matter of Intelligence

Synergising India's intelligence is essential to safeguard the national interests

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THE NOVEMBER 26 ATTACKS IN Mumbai followed by successive Maoists strikes in recent months have increased focus on homeland security. Major re-grouping of terrorist groups in Pakistan during 2004-2007 occurred under General Kayani as DG ISI. Cashing on US dependence on Pakistan, he as army chief has artfully orchestrated LeT expansion on lines of al Qaeda/Taliban, needing ISAF/US presence in Afghanistan while collaborating with China to subdue Uighur dissent. Second tenure of Kayani as head of Pakistan Army will without doubt boost terrorism in India.

The need to synergise our intelligence is as urgent as never before amidst asymmetric wars (AW) waged by the China-Pakistan combine. Borders being irrelevant in such conflict, classical segmenting of internal and trans-border intelligence will not work; internal and external need to merge. The nation has to debate the intelligence framework required to deal with overlapping situations of asymmetric war that will continue simultaneous to conventional conflict situations. Our adversaries are exploiting our fault lines with impunity. Synergising India's intelligence is essential to safeguard our national interests. Moves are afoot to establish a National Information Grid (NATGRID), Multi Agency Centre (MAC) and a National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) besides NTRO having come up but overall effort appears stymied with apparent clash in roles of the home minister (HM) and NSA and problem in bringing all intelligence agencies under one umbrella amidst calls for a 'wider mandate' to the home minister.

Core Issue

Of late there has been talk of establishing a legal framework including parliamentary and judicial oversight for our intelligence structures. This would indeed be good provided it improves the output of intelligence at the user end and meets inclusive requirements of national security. It should not be overshadowed by issues like legalising intel-



TERROR STRUCK A terrorist attack site in Kashmir

ligence agencies, giving them a charter, providing them legal protection and to generally improve functioning of intelligence agencies. Operational intelligence cannot be given short shrift, albeit, some intelligence experts view operational intelligence a very small part compared to industrial/economic intelligence etc. If latter was the case, then we should ignore effects of the Kargil on our economy, and how sensex dips after every terrorists strike. The legal architecture should firmly focus on improving 'output of intelligence agencies for users'. Peripherals like 'legalising', 'provision of charter' and 'legal protection' to intelligence agencies should only strengthen this focus. Deviation from this would only endorse the Concept of 'Emperor's Clothes' notwithstanding the good work done. A vital primary step in this direction is to synergise India's intelligence.

Emperor's Clothes

Arguably, intelligence agencies have a difficult task to perform and there may be operational constraints. No doubt there have been sporadic successes that under shroud of secrecy are difficult to judge otherwise, however, numerous examples indicate that tasking of our intelligence agencies is not systemic

and their output leaves much to be desired. When President Gayoom of Maldives asked for Indian help, external intelligence could only produce a tourist map for launching our military. The glaring lack of intelligence of the Kargil intrusions is well known. External intelligence cannot get away by saying they had informed the army through a letter. The fact that Pakistan's effort was over several months, how come enemy movements beyond Skardu were not monitored and reported periodically? Considering the gravity and scale of the intrusions, why was the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) not briefed periodically in advance about enormity of the threat developing to national security? How come we had no advance intelligence of the impending massacre in Nepal, attempted military coup in Bangladesh and events that led to the exodus of thousands of Indian businessmen from Fiji and they being replaced by Chinese?

Intelligence experts admit that we have a terrible glut of human sources for intelligence. Why and who is responsible for this? We had hardly any sources in Afghanistan and Iraq when Americans went in. Why so, when these countries are well within our area of strategic

interest? Why is the state of language experts so pathetic in India — both in quality and in numbers? The Pakistani process of ‘transplanting armed modules’ in heartland India taking cognisable shape in 1992-93 is chronicled by a former IB official in his book Open Secrets. Have we monitored this embedded terrorist architecture over the past 17-18 years, its linkages and the threat it poses to our sovereignty? Had we done this, there would have been little doubts whether 26/11 had support from within India. Surely the NSC appreciated Parliament as a prominent terrorist target months/years prior to actual attack. How come we had no intelligence on the perpetrators within New Delhi till the attack actually took place? Terrorist attacks will occur but if we had efficient intelligence structures, could 26/11 occur in the manner and the ease with which it did?

Are we monitoring the Chinese presence in Nepal; construction workers (Chinese use PLA for road construction) and a string of hotels manned and owned by Chinese? Are we monitoring the PLA presence in Myanmar and POK to the required extent? Who defines the ‘required extent’? If we have refrained from commenting on the Chinese links to Maoist movement in Nepal, is it not a case of lack of intelligence? Surely we are not scared of the Chinese while Chinese media terms Arunachal Pradesh as ‘South Tibet’ — a part of China!

Do we have the required linkages with separatist leaders in POK and Baltistan who want to separate from Pakistan? What has been the effect of shift of a number of terrorist camps by Pakistan from western/southern POK to Baltistan during 2004-2005? Musharraf and his cohorts used to meet hardcore Hurriyat and other separatist leaders openly in Delhi during official visits. Do we have the intelligence and links to reciprocate in similar fashion? Are we permitting the Kashmir imbroglio to be viewed globally only as a ‘J&K’ problem — confined to Indian side of the Line of Control?

Have our intelligence structures developed means to assess information that Chinese are extracting from India through embedded sources (bugs, trojans, trapdoors) other than through hackers? Are we aware that India does not manufacture a single computer but only assembles them with almost 100 per cent parts coming from China and that over 90 per cent of BSNL equipment is Chinese? Have the intelligence

agencies apprised the CCS of gravity of the situation and recommended counter measures?

Tasking for Intelligence

For streamlining our intelligence, we must closely look at the tasking of our intelligence agencies. How is it actually done? Is there an overall road map? If so, what is it? Is the tasking in concert with our national security objectives? It is difficult to believe that this is the case because till date a national security strategy and national security objectives have not been articulated by any government in India. These glaring voids need to be filled up on priority. Tasking of intelligence agencies is required on following lines: One, formulation of national security strategy and national security objectives. This would crystallise the areas of our strategic interest leading to the required road-map including placement of sources and the like. Two, ‘Bottom Up Tasking’ based on demands of the users. Three, a system of Automatic Periodic Updating of Specified Intelligence (APUSI) needs to be introduced where specific operational intelligence updates must flow down without the need of filing periodic demands, with some getting lost in transit or not attended to, as is presently the case. Such specific intelligence and periodicity of automatic updates must be codified.

In viewing national level intelligence structures, the apparent dichotomy is that large amount of ‘external intelligence’ may not be strictly relevant to the MHA and will be of more concern to the MEA, MoD and other ministries

Human Intelligence

HumInt will remain a central requirement in countering conflict situations including terrorism/non-traditional threats and for meeting government/military needs for creating relevant information and tailored intelligence to facilitate growth of the Indian state economically and as a regional/global power. Legal frameworks must ensure build-up of HumInt to desired levels and find answers to the following: Why do we have a dearth of HumInt sources when ISI has been freely recruiting from our Northeast including Bangladeshi

illegal immigrants? While intelligence agencies admit lack of HumInt sources, why is the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) which is mandated to operate trans-border sources, not being permitted to do so? Is it because civil intelligence agencies fear loss of individual turfs? While foreign countries including Pakistan are capitalising on their Special Forces operating trans-border as HumInt sources, why have we failed to do so? Is it again because civil intelligence agencies fear loss of individual turfs? Should we not dovetail sources of the DIA and our Special Forces into the overall national HumInt architecture when it is clear that this will be the heart, soul and brain of 21st century intelligence?

Net Centricity

Any talk of integration is anathema to our intelligence agencies. Integration is perceived as loss of turf and more importantly increased accountability that no one wants. The term ‘integration’ actually needs to be replaced by networking or better net-centricity. Networking intelligence agencies is essential because:

- ▶ To cope with asymmetric threats in emerging geo-strategic environment, net-centricity alone is the answer. The amount of available information is enormous and will keep multiplying. Multiple intelligence inputs coupled with fog of fast paced situations complicate decision making. There may also be instances where information/intelligence is available but is not disseminated/delayed, some even under pretext ‘it was not asked for’.
- ▶ Future threats demand creation of more dynamic and responsive intelligence structures since it involves corroborating and sharing of information to ensure all appropriate assets can be quickly brought to bear upon where required. It pre-supposes the abandonment of the classical hierarchical command and control system. Horizontal fusion of information calls for sharing of information by all concerned components in real time.
- ▶ Net centricity will automatically usher in accountability, improve intelligence management and negate one upmanship.

Information ascendancy is crucial for national security. NatGrid was needed a decade back. A national data super-highway interfaced with a national

intelligence database and with need-to-know basis access rights to various defence, law enforcement and other government agencies has the capacity to revolutionise the way in which the national defence and security concerns are currently being addressed. Intelligence architecture should link intelligence agencies with the MAC (Multi Agency Centre), the NCTC (National Counter terrorism Centre), SCTCs (State Counter Terrorism Centres) and concerned security forces besides others.

Networking intelligence is a multi disciplinary process. The end result should be a system of Automated Intelligence Collection, an Automated Assessment process (enabling short, medium and long term assessments) using DSS (Decision Support System) and Online Dissemination of intelligence in real/near real time to all concerned including a COP (Common Operational Picture) on need to know basis. Some critical issues that will need to be addressed at the inception stage include Evolution of an Enterprise Architecture, Integration and Interoperability, Communications, Bandwidth and Latency, induction of New Technologies, Robustness of Transmission, Management of Data Bases, Information Security, Information Overload and Time for Implementation.

The networked intelligence structure will require a large sized intelligence operations room filled with computer consoles etc. at the apex. So be it. If India is to meet the challenges of the 21st century, network its intelligence structures in requisite manner and emerge as a global player, this should be no big deal. The NCTC while combining intelligence agencies like NIA, JIC and National Crime Record Bureau etc. should also have under its ambit agencies like R&AW, ARC and NTRO without viewing it as loss of cabinet secretary’s turf. If we do not aim for 100 per cent cohesion and synergy, only partial aims will be achieved. If we begin now, it will likely take 8-10 years to achieve complete intelligence net centricity, given our bureaucratic functioning. Existing data bases of intelligence agencies are not interoperable. Common standards and protocols will need to be developed, followed by requisite software and security solutions (that under existing CPC Policy can only be developed by CAIR), laboratory testing, approval by SAG, field testing and finally the fielding. The NSDI (National Spatial Data Infrastructure) though established a few years back, is still not networked with

concerned ministries and agencies for similar reasons.

Parliamentary and Judicial Oversight

Emphasis should be on systemic tasking, networking, coordination, monitoring and accountability to improve quality of intelligence products and real/near real time delivery. There are no defined battlefields in non traditional/asymmetric threats and borders are ambiguous. Future conflict situations may require simultaneous deployment of all the military, para-military, police and other security forces depending on dispersion and simultaneity of the threat. Networking requirements therefore become paramount, entailing a 24/7 set up. What then should be the organisation for Parliamentary and Judicial Oversight? A GoM (Group of Ministers)/GoP (Group of Parliamentarians)/Committee signifies adhocism and would likely end up in irregular meetings. Committees mostly are advisory bodies with little accountability towards execution of their very own recommendations. The requirement is of a permanent body with specific executive powers with regard to intelligence structures, assisted by a full time body of specialists. Unless the proposed organisation/structure are strengthened by providing the wherewithal with due authority for execution, no amount of advice, strategy, and policy direction will get implemented.

The process of synergising intelligence structures to some extent has already commenced under the home minister (HM) through NCTC, MAC, NATGRID albeit centred on counter terrorism and homeland security. In viewing national level intelligence structures, the apparent dichotomy is that large amount of ‘external intelligence’ may not be strictly relevant to the MHA and will be of more concern to the MEA, MoD and other ministries. Therefore, some argue that it may not be prudent to task the MHA or any one single ministry with handling national level intelligence. On the other hand, the NSA is an ‘advisor’ sans the wherewithal to ‘execute’. The options therefore available are as under:

- ▶ **Option 1:** Expand upon the NCTC-MAC combine (being affected through combining intelligence agencies like NIA, JIC and National Crime Record Bureau etc). Expansion should bring under its ambit agencies like R&AW, ARC, DIA, NTRO etc, which could be termed

National intelligence Infrastructure (NII). The NII could be headed by a National Intelligence Executive (NIE) assisted by a group of specialists, functioning directly under the PMO with parallel links to MoD, MHA, MEA etc. It is important that the ‘group of specialist’ is not restricted to members/ex-members of intelligence agencies for obvious reasons. The NIE should be answerable for Parliamentary and Judicial Oversight to the PM as well as a GoMs/GoPs as appointed.

- ▶ **Option 2:** The NII be headed by the NSA who can be given an expanded role, obviating requirement of a NIE. In such case, the NSA will require requisite executive powers and be assisted by a group of specialists (not restricted to members/ex-members of intelligence agencies) and have parallel links to MoD, MHA, MEA etc. The NSA should be answerable for Parliamentary and Judicial Oversight to the PM as well as a GoMs/GoPs as appointed.

- ▶ **Option 3:** The NII be headed by the home minister himself, given the simultaneity of non traditional and conventional conflict situations, and overwhelming frequency of non traditional conflict situations over conventional wars. HM heading the NII should be assisted by a group of specialists (not restricted to members/ex-members of intelligence agencies) and have parallel links to MoD, MEA, NSA etc. The HM should be answerable for Parliamentary and Judicial Oversight to the PM as well as a GoMs/GoPs as appointed.

Conclusion

Intelligence is the key to safeguard our sovereignty, economic growth and for securing our rightful place in the world order. Synergising our intelligence in order to cope with emerging threats can no longer be postponed. Complacency in this regard will increase the asymmetric advantage that our adversaries are capitalising on. In defining legal architecture for our intelligence structures, the bottom line should be ‘to improve output of intelligence agencies’ for the users. We must task our intelligence agencies in concert with our national security objectives. A networked intelligence set up including requisite HumInt framework will give India that extra edge in coping with conventional, non traditional and asymmetric threats in the emerging