

# Policy Report

## The Unending Quest to Reform India's National Security System



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## Executive summary

*India has evolved an enormous national security system comprising the colonial-era police system in the States, the Army, Navy and Air Force, Central Armed Police Forces, as well as a vast intelligence apparatus. These forces are managed by a generalist bureaucracy and a political class who have shown little specialised interest in their task. Over the years there have been several efforts to reform and overhaul the national security system. Not surprisingly, the impetus for this has sometimes been the consequence of defeat or a sense of failure. The task force on national security, popularly known as the Naresh Chandra Committee (since it was chaired by former Cabinet Secretary Naresh Chandra), has been the latest of these iterations. This was set up in 2011 and submitted its report in mid-2012. However, till now the government has failed to act on its recommendations, which cover the entire gamut of national security issues. As the report remains classified, this paper seeks to examine the issue through publicly available information, as well as through discussion and debate of issues that have formed the substance of several reports of special parliamentary and official committees since the 1990s. It concludes that there are serious structural constraints in the way of India being able to carry out the deep reform that is needed in its national security system.*

From the time of its independence, India has sought to reform its national security system. It began with trying to Indianise the British-era armed forces and intelligence system, followed by the modernisation imperative arising from the U.S.-Pakistan alliance in the mid-1950s. Subsequently, reform came in the wake of numerous wars — the disastrous one of 1962, the draw of 1965 and the victory of 1971.<sup>1</sup> But it is the nuclear tests of 1998, a mini-war in Kargil in 1999, a decade's discussion within the strategic community and the arrival of a Bharatiya Janata Party that led to the first comprehensive reform effort through the Kargil Review Commission and what is called the Group of Ministers (GOM) report of 2001.<sup>2</sup> Despite these efforts, the system has remained dysfunctional. This has manifested itself in India's vulnerability to not just terrorist attacks, but cross-border incursions, as was the case in Kargil. Its mobilisation of 2002 and its lack of a military response to the Mumbai attack of 2008 have been attributed to the lack of readiness of its armed forces. Many of these issues were aptly summed up in the 2010 book by Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, the title of which— *Arming without Aiming* — almost seemed to suggest that India was doomed to maintain a policy of “strategic restraint.”<sup>3</sup>

By 2011, it was clear that many of the reforms pushed by the GOM had only been partially implemented. This was because, given the way the government works, once the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has adopted a course, it is generally followed, but subsequently, decisions and directives are re-interpreted to undermine the basic thrust of a particular reform.

Many of these issues formed the context in which the National Security Task Force 2011, popularly known as the Naresh Chandra Committee (NCC) was created. Equally important were the strategic changes, for instance the rise of China, in India's neighbourhood and beyond. This was accentuated by the 2008-2009 economic crisis, which lent a sense of urgency to Indian planners, who were painfully aware of the inner weaknesses of the system.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen P Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its contribution to the development of a nation* (New Delhi OUP, 1990) pp. 170-3. See also S.S. Khera, *India's Defence Problem* (Bombay, Orient Longmans, 1968) Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> Details of the work of these commissions may be found in Anit Mukherjee, *Failing to Deliver: Post-Crises Defence Reforms in India, 1998-2010* (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) Occasional Paper No 18 March 2011, New Delhi)

<sup>3</sup> Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernisation* (New Delhi, Penguin/Viking, 2010).

## What was new about the Naresh Chandra Committee?

The NCC was the first reform committee which was formed without a preceding crisis or war. It was initiated by the National Security Advisor and seen as arising from a systemic requirement which India may need to fulfil every decade or so to fine tune its national security system.

The government constituted the NCC in July 2011, and the committee submitted its report to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the end of May 2012. Thereafter the report was handed over to the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) to process.<sup>4</sup> The NCC was asked to focus on all kinds of external threats, internal challenges, and external resource constraints that could affect India's development and the threats to the strategic infrastructure, physical as well as cyber.<sup>5</sup>

This was, however, about the time that the United Progressive Alliance government lost its momentum, caught in anti-corruption agitations on one hand and revelations coming from the Comptroller and Auditor General on a range of issues on the other. Since then, the government has been mulling over the NCC's recommendations without taking any decisions.

The thrust of the NCC was on five distinct issues: the external challenge, internal security, strategic resources and infrastructure intelligence and cyber security.

### The external challenge

The NCC saw its task as providing a holistic set of national security-related recommendations on planning, doctrines, objectives, organisation

and institution building. Some of the information in this section has relied on a part of the report which was leaked to the media by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in a bid to scuttle some of the recommendations.<sup>6</sup>

One of the major weaknesses of the Indian system has been the absence of clear-cut objectives for India's defence and security policies, and stemming from this, a balanced response with respect to the threats — real and potential — and the capabilities India needed to accumulate to deal with them. Towards that end, the NCC made important recommendations on the need for the country to enunciate a formal National Security Doctrine, incorporating elements of traditional and non-traditional security, and come up with a public document on a National Security Strategy clearly outlining the country's defence and foreign policies.

But the principal recommendation related to the appointment of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)-like figure. Given the reluctance of the system to accept the 2001 GOM's proposal to appoint a CDS, the NCC recommended that the government create the position of a Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). This would provide a fourth four-star officer to the COSC,<sup>7</sup> but who would be *primus inter pares* among the chiefs of staff of the three services. He would be assisted by a 3-star chief of staff heading the existing Integrated Defence Staff (IDS).

The Permanent Chairman COSC would: (i) coordinate and prioritise the 15-year Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) and the Annual Acquisition Plan, (ii) administer the tri-service institutions and agencies, (iii) exercise command over the Andaman & Nicobar Command, the Special Operations Forces and

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<sup>4</sup> The NCC was chaired by Naresh Chandra, former Cabinet Secretary, former service chiefs Admiral Arun Prakash and Air Chief Marshal S. Krishnaswamy, Ambassador G. Parthasarthy, former R&AW chief K. C. Verma, former Director Intelligence Bureau P. C. Haldar, former chief of the Department of Atomic Energy Anil Kakodkar, former Home Secretary V. K. Duggal, Brijeshwar Singh, a former civil servant, former police officers D. Sivanandan, R. V. Raju, Lt Gen (retd) V. R. Raghavan, economist Suman Bery and journalist Manoj Joshi.

<sup>5</sup> The 178 page report had some 400-odd principal recommendations, but could actually involve some 2,500 actionable points.

<sup>6</sup> For reference to the leak, see Pinaki Bhattacharya, "Incompetence and howlers" *Millennium Post*, 9 August 2012 <http://millenniumpost.in/NewsContent.aspx?NID=6628>

<sup>7</sup> For some details on the issue of the permanent Chiefs of Staff Committee Chairman see Bharat Karnad, "Streamlining defence" *The Asian Age*, August 2, 2012, p. 7

forces involved in out of area contingencies, (iv) have administrative control over the Strategic Forces Command, (v) plan and conduct joint service exercises which could be used to prove a future theatre command concept, (vi) encourage the creation of integrated logistics, training and administrative mechanisms involving all three services, (vii) be the source of coordinated advice on matters relating to two or more service, and (viii) prepare an annual defence status report which would lay out the readiness posture of the services.

In effect, he would become the principal military advisor to the government. But the MoD and, indeed, the Defence Minister himself have weighed against this appointment publicly, even before the Cabinet Committee on Security has had the opportunity to consider the recommendation.<sup>8</sup>

The NCC also focused on the need to change the rules that govern the functioning of the bureaucracy — the so-called Transaction of Business Rules and the Allocation of Business Rules. As the leaked version of the NCC noted, though as per the GOM recommendations the Services HQs were notionally upgraded from being “attached offices” to “integrated HQ” of MOD, “there was in effect no substantial delegation of authority to the Services Chiefs.” As of now, while the Minister runs the MoD, the civilian Secretary remains responsible “for the proper transaction of business” of the Ministry. The rules are silent on the responsibilities of the uniformed personnel and so the NCC has called for suitable amendments to the AoB and ToB rules to reflect the responsibilities of the new Permanent Chairman COSC and the service chiefs, “insofar as their command functions, the defence of India and the conduct of war are concerned.”

An important set of recommendations for the integration of the armed forces headquarters with the civilian Ministry of Defence related to functional integration and cross-staffing which would see military personnel included in the chain of command of the Defence Secretary’s office and civilian officers in the Service headquarters. The leaked portion of the NCC noted that the

Defence Secretary “needs to have a good mix of uniformed personnel and civilians at all verticals. Preferably, a special cadre of Defence specialists should be introduced into the civil service to ensure knowledge build-up among the civilian staff.” While the task force did not delve too deeply into the functioning of India’s foreign policy, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), and the institutions associated with it, it did make recommendations for better coordination and management of politico-military issues involving the MEA and MoD.

### **Internal security**

The focus of internal security was mainly on small fixes rather than on any large big-bang proposal. The GOM had proposed many reforms which had not been effectively implemented. The focus of the internal security recommendations were, in a sense, predictable. They related primarily to Left Wing Extremism, terrorism, separatism in Jammu & Kashmir and the North-east, and border management and coastal security. The task force took a comprehensive approach and examined problems in relation to socio-economic conflicts that may arise as India developed, as well as the perennial problems of reforming the policing and criminal justice system.

The report’s perspective was shaped by the constitutional requirements which do not speak of “national security” as such, but view “security” in terms of the Emergency powers which the Union government can assume when the country is threatened “by war or external aggression or armed rebellion.” However, in practice, “security”, especially in relation to internal issues, is something which is the common interest of the States and the Union government. The two need a cooperative perspective where their respective duties and obligations are outlined by Articles 256, 355, 356 and 365 of the constitution. For example, the armed forces and their deployment is an exclusive domain of the Union government, whereas, public order and policing are the domain of the states.

Criminal law and administration of justice are concurrent powers shared by the Union and the

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<sup>8</sup> Ajai Shukla, “A.K. Antony’s intellectual dishonesty,” *Business Standard*, December 9, 2013, also see “No hasty decision on top military post,” in the *New Indian Express*, December 7, 2013.

States. This is an important aspect of internal security management in India, since many of the States are ruled by Opposition parties, and the country is confronted with threats like terrorism, narcotics smuggling and fake currency which have an international dimension. The NCC made an effort to suggest ways and means through which internal security issues could be handled in the spirit of “cooperative federalism”.

The two-decade experience of the country with terrorism has brought out what in another area is called the “last mile problem”. In States of the North-east, in Maoist-affected Orissa, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand and other states of the Union affected by terrorism, the big weakness is the quality of local policing and intelligence gathering. This is an area where reform ideas can be mooted by the Union government, but their adoption and implementation requires the States to come on board, and this is where they are most reluctant.

On the issue of terrorism, one of the items in the NCC agenda was the establishment of a National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC). The government pre-empted its deliberations and announced the setting up of one by an executive order of 3 February 2012. However, the NCTC subsequently got embroiled in controversy and has not been established.<sup>9</sup>

### **Strategic resources and infrastructure management**

The perspective of the NCC on strategic resources and infrastructure is based on an assumption of high and continuing economic growth requiring access to important strategic resources, the creation and protection of strategic infrastructure, like highways, railroads, bridges, telecom networks and pipelines, and the maintenance of strategic autonomy by the country.

For India, the matter of strategic resources is important. Today, it is importing not only 70 per cent of its oil, but a significant proportion of the

coal used for power plants. Though it is rich in coal, iron ore, chromite, zinc, manganese and bauxite, the poor utilisation of its coal resources and the lack of significant oil and natural gas resources make it vulnerable. There are also minerals like nickel that India lacks, in addition to some rare earths and refractory metals.

Following the first Gulf War of 1990, India began thinking about establishing a strategic crude oil reserve. But the implementation of a plan for a reserve of around 5 million metric tonnes, sufficient for two weeks consumption, has been set in motion only in 2011. The oil reserve is maintained in tanks in different parts of the country by the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd, a special purpose company set up for the purpose. More recently, there has been talk of raising the reserves to 21 million metric tonnes by 2020.

The perspective of NCC recommendations was not just based on continuing growth, but on the increasing sophistication of the Indian economy requiring access to base metals like aluminium, copper, lead, and zinc, “technology metals” like molybdenum, gallium, titanium, tungsten and cobalt, and “energy metals” like lithium and silicon. India produces only two per cent of the world’s supply of rare earths, whereas China is the dominant country, meeting some 90 per cent of the world’s demand. It is not that India lacks some of these metals, but it has never bothered to search for them or to use existing ores to extract them.

### **Intelligence**

All the recommendations on the area of intelligence in the 2001 GOM report were redacted in the report released to the public. Some information on the recommendations came through the press release accompanying the report.<sup>10</sup> Other information came through scattered media reportage and an important article by the former Deputy NSA in an annual

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<sup>9</sup> Two issues were involved, first, the provision of arrest powers to the Intelligence Bureau which would run the NCTC, and second the worry about the Union encroaching on the powers of the states in relation to law and order, see “More states oppose NCTC: govt in a firefighting mode,” *Times of India*, February 9, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Press release in possession of the author.

publication of the NSCS.<sup>11</sup> They enable us to develop a perspective on how the NCC is likely to have dealt with the issue.

The key lacunae pointed out related to the continued tendency towards silo mentality in the intelligence agencies and the persisting problems with getting apex level coordination. The GOM recommended the formation of the Intelligence Coordination Group. To some extent, problems arose in the tasking mechanisms developed by the NSCS. Traditionally, the agencies were used to defining their own tasks and carrying them out. Having some coordination put in ran up against the problem that the NSCS was not quite knowledgeable about what the capabilities of the agencies were, and not surprisingly, the latter were unwilling to open up on these to another agency.

The big watershed in terms of intelligence was the Mumbai attack of November 2008. This compelled the government to create the Multi Agency Centre (MAC) that had been recommended by the GOM and over which they had been dawdling. In addition, it seriously affected National Security Advisor M. K. Narayanan's standing within the government. Thereafter, the Prime Minister put the Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram in charge of security issues and the latter instituted daily meetings to force coordination among the agencies. Besides Narayanan, the attendees included Home Secretary Madhukar Gupta, Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW) chief Ashok Chaturvedi, Intelligence Bureau (IB) Director P. C. Haldar and other senior officers of IB and Military Intelligence.

After Narayanan's departure, the new NSA created the National Intelligence Board, now known as the N Int B to differentiate it from the National Information Board which had been set up as part of the GOM reforms, to deal with matters of coordination at the apex level. This comprised the NSA, the Cabinet Secretary and the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister. But what was clearly missing was a figure, the equivalent of the Director, National Intelligence, of the kind which the United States had created in the wake of 9/11. The imperative for coordination

also came from the multiplicity of intelligence agencies, which included several dealing with technical intelligence, which requires quick and seamless dissemination.

Another area that needed to be addressed was the issue of overlap in the functions of various agencies. The GOM of 2001 provided each agency with a specific charter, which was unique since for the first time they were given such a directive. But, the directives did not have the specificity or the authority of legislation and hence there were many instances of overlap such as whether the Defence Intelligence Agency had the same authority to conduct cross-border Humint (human intelligence) operations as Military Intelligence. In addition, the charters were issued by the executive and they could always be re-interpreted by subsequent orders or directives by the competing agencies.

The 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack has continued to lend focus to the need for intelligence gathering to go down to the village and *thana* (local police station) level. The GOM recommended the creation of the MAC and state level units (SMACs) for gathering intelligence on terror issues. Subsequently, the idea of "fusion centres" where state and central level officials could collate information on other crimes like narcotics and money laundering could be shared, but only a few of these were established.

Analysis is another weakness of the Indian intelligence system. The manner in which the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) was subsumed into the NSCS in 2001 and then revived in 2006 has only made things worse. The GOM expected the NSCS to undertake the analysis and tasking of intelligence services, but M. K. Narayanan, the NSA in 2006, felt that this was not working and reverted to the older arrangement. There is need for the system to separate collection and analysis of intelligence while strengthening both these functions.

An important area that needs focus in the era of the information revolution is that of open source information. Information is emanating not only from traditional media sources such

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<sup>11</sup> See "Satish Chandra, 'National Security System and Reform,' in Satish Kumar", *India's National Security Annual Review, 2005* (New Delhi, Knowledge World, 2005), also see Praveen Swami, "A new intelligence organisation," *Frontline*, vol. 19 no. 6 March 16-29, 2002.

as newspapers, magazines and television, but also social media like micro-blogs, Twitter and Facebook. Professional journals and openly available technical literature provide another source of information.

Other areas requiring attention includes the shortage of personnel in various intelligence agencies. While the government tends to be too big in certain areas, almost all intelligence agencies face a shortage of personnel. Some of the shortage arises from the inability to recruit the right kind of people for the job on hand, but it is also a consequence of the general ability of the government to get people with specific language or technical skills.

The issue that has developed some salience in recent years, not only through various committees and inquiries, but through civil society, relates to the oversight of the intelligence agencies, which India alone among democracies lacks.<sup>12</sup> The problems with oversight are many. Intelligence agencies are loath to accept any oversight as it is. In addition, given the inexperience of Indian politicians with matters relating to security, there are worries that information could leak. However, given the fact that there are several senior politicians who have served government in key ministries, it should not be too difficult to construct an oversight mechanism comprised of former members of, say, the CCS. In some measure, however, there is reluctance on the part of the government of the day on this issue because the Intelligence Bureau is involved in a great deal of domestic political espionage. This is a widely known fact, yet, politicians conveniently overlook it when they take charge of the government.

However, there is another kind of oversight which can be introduced—this is that by an inspector-general who is himself a senior intelligence or security professional and whose reporting chain can be established in such a way that he is provided the requisite authority. For the present, however, the more practical method seems to be the oversight provided by the N Int B comprising the NSA (Chair), the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Secretary.

## Cyber Security

In India, cyber security is managed by a number of agencies. The National Information Board was set up by the GOM and is the apex level institution, which is chaired by the NSA and has all the relevant department heads as its members. It formulates national policy on information security as well as on information security governance. The National Crisis Management Committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary and comprising various secretaries to the government, deals with crises in general and is also responsible for handling any cyber emergency.

In more practical terms, cyber security comes under the purview of the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), which is the secretariat for the NIB, and the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is responsible for cyber security in the various departments of the government. The Intelligence Bureau issues overall security guidelines for cyber security, which government departments are mandated to follow. The Ministry of Defence is the nodal agency for cyber security in the defence sector, though its practical work is done by the Defence Intelligence Agency reporting to the Integrated Defence Staff.

The National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC)-Indian Emergency Computer Response Team (CERT-In) monitors Indian cyber space and coordinates warnings on imminent attacks and detection of malicious attacks for public and private users of the internet. There are also sectoral CERTs for the Railways, Oil and Natural Gas sector and so on. Associated with this is the proposed National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC), which will gather intelligence and keeps a watch on threats both to the civilian and defence infrastructure.

The NCC's recommendations on this area have been tempered by the awareness that so far no country has found the right formula for protection against cyber threats. The solutions required and proposed are in the technological, managerial, policy prescription and enforcement domains, and, most importantly, risk management.

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<sup>12</sup> See "SC notice to centre on PIL to bring IB and RAW under statute," *Indian Express*, February 12, 2013.

An important aspect for consideration has been India's weakness in hardware, which potentially opens its systems to attack. India has considerable skills in the software area and the NCC has sought to harness the capabilities of Indian institutions to come up with solutions.

Beyond the area of cyber security for ordinary users and critical infrastructure, the NCC had to look into the areas which are confidential, related to cryptography, network security and information security of the institutions of national security. Yet, given the nature of the problem, it is impossible to separate the civil and national security aspects of cyber security, and so there is an unprecedented level of cooperation between agencies of the government and the civil information technology sector in this area.

### **Conclusion, or what blocks the reforms**

As of this writing, the government has yet to take a decision on the Naresh Chandra Committee Report. Right through independent India's history, there has never been a shortage of expert advice on how the country should manage its national security. In hindsight, it may appear that the suggestions have been inadequate or downright wrong, but that is not unusual. What is surprising is the system's inability to absorb the suggestions and implement them in good faith.

The fact that this has not happened suggests some structural problems. Some of these become evident when we examine the case of the recommendations relating to the Chief of Defence Staff or, in its avatar in the NCC, the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

At the time the GOM recommendations were released by the National Democratic Alliance government in 2001, it was noted in the press release that the Cabinet Committee on Security would consider the GOM's recommendation on

the creation of a Chief of Defence Staff, "after the government is able to consult various political parties." There were, however, few signs that such a consultation was, indeed, taking place. A year after it had taken office, in June 2005, the Defence Minister of the new United Progressive Alliance government, Pranab Mukherjee, told a TV channel in an interview that the CDS post "would require a broad political consensus among parties, both in office and in opposition."<sup>13</sup> The Ministry of Defence told the Standing Committee on Defence that "the process of consultation with political parties has been initiated by issuing letters to the National and State level political parties by the Raksha Mantri [Defence Minister] on March 2, 2006."<sup>14</sup>

In December 2009, the MOD's response had not changed much. It noted that "the case for finding consensus ...has been taken up with political parties by the Raksha Mantri. Since a number of political parties have yet to respond, a final reply can only be prepared on receipt of replies from them." Ignoring this, the parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence (SCOD) had gone on to recommend the institution of a CDS, noting that "there is an urgent need to use the various fora of interaction with the leaders of the political parties. In the interim, the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee should be given the appropriate authority."<sup>15</sup>

In this sense the NCC recommendation to create a Permanent Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee was merely a reiteration of an idea already approved by the SCOD which was actually representative of all political parties in both the houses of Parliament. Yet, as late as 4 December 2013, Defence Minister A.K. Antony once again repeated the old nostrum that his ministry had written to political parties asking them to give their opinion on the issue of having a CDS for the armed forces. This came a day after the Navy Chief, D.K. Joshi disclosed that the three Service Chiefs had among them agreed that there was need for a Permanent Chairman of the COSC in

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<sup>13</sup> "CDS only after political consensus, says Pranab," *Times of India*, June 13, 2005

<sup>14</sup> Standing Committee on Defence (SCOD), Fourteenth Lok Sabha, *Twenty-Second Report*, July 2007 p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> SCOD, Fifteenth Lok Sabha, *Second Report*, December 2009 pp. 5-6

<sup>16</sup> "Antony sounds parties again on Chief of Defence Staff post," *The Hindu*, December 5, 2013 and Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar "Service heads agree to permanent chair for Chiefs of Staff Committee," *The Hindu*, December 3, 2013.

line with the Naresh Chandra Committee report as an interim measure pending the eventual appointment of a CDS.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear from the above sequence that there are probably three sources of opposition to reform. The first are the highest political authorities of the land. Their opposition is not stated explicitly, but evident from their actions. It began in the wake of Independence, when they insisted on de-rating the office of the Commander-in-chief by first diluting his authority and then abolishing the office altogether. At the time, the armed forces acquiesced because they felt that such a change was perhaps the inevitable outcome of the independence of the country. Behind the minds of the politicians, again never explicitly stated was the fear of a military coup. This was not as ridiculous as it seems today, because at that time, India was a rare case where an undeveloped country was able to sustain a democracy.

Yet, there were several instances in the 1950s and 1960s where the politicians disclosed their insecurities in relation to the armed forces. In the first instance, the rumours came when General K. S. Thimayya retired as army chief. Later, in a letter to Bertrand Russell, Nehru expressed his concerns about the military. Many of these fears were stoked by the IB chief, B. N. Mullik.<sup>17</sup>

It would be reassuring to say that those were the responses of the times when Third World democracies were rare. But these views remain current in the highest levels of the Indian political system today.<sup>18</sup> This is borne out by a controversy

that arose from a report in the *Indian Express* in 2012, claiming that there had been unusual movements of the army on the night of January 15, 2012.<sup>19</sup> While there are, no doubt, two sides to the picture, it is clear that the *Indian Express* was given privileged information from a high-level source which we can surmise did not belong to the uniformed fraternity.<sup>20</sup>

The second source of resistance to the crucial appointment of a CDS comes from the civil administration and the intelligence community. The concerns of the latter are easy to comprehend—they are paid to be ever vigilant and suspicious. With the civil bureaucracy, the issue is more complex. It is a matter of maintaining control over the armed forces on behalf of the political system. But this is done without any expertise and the consequences of this are the dysfunctional national security system that India has landed itself with.

As Cohen and Dasgupta have noted, “The bureaucracy that functions as the secretariat for the political leaders comprises generalists with little practical knowledge of military matters, but this group lobbies powerfully to preserve its position against military encroachment.”<sup>21</sup>

The third source of resistance has been from within the Services themselves. According to reports in the media, the principal opposition to the appointment of the CDS in 2001 came from the Indian Air Force, which felt that it would be marginalised as a service should such a concept, with the inevitable creation of theatre commands,

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<sup>17</sup> Khera (n.1) has devoted an entire chapter to this issue in his 1968 book. Nehru wrote to Bertrand Russell worrying about the dangers of a coup in the wake of the 1962 debacle. Subsequently, following Nehru's death, there was the incident where the army chief, General J.N. Chaudhry, was suspected of planning a coup when he ordered additional forces to reach Delhi to organise the Prime Minister's funeral. See Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (Dehra Dun: Natraj, 2013), p. 502.

<sup>18</sup> This writer was told by a former National Security Adviser that the principal opposition to the CDS in the UPA government came from Ms Sonia Gandhi, who raised worries about the possibility of a coup were a CDS-like figure be appointed.

<sup>19</sup> See <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/the-january-night-raisina-hill-was-spooked-two-key-army-units-moved-towards-delhi-without-notifying-govt/932328/> and General V. K. Singh with Kunal Verma, *Courage and Conviction: An Autobiography* (New Delhi, Aleph, 2013), p. 336.

<sup>20</sup> Confirmation that there was panic in the government over some innocuous troop movements came through an interview the *Indian Express* carried of the then Director General Military Operation Lt Gen A. K. Chowdhry two years later, see <http://epaper.indianexpress.com/232605/Indian-Express/21-February-2014>, though even this was muddied the following day by the former Air Force Chief N.A.K. Browne claiming that the exercise one of the army units was heading for was to take place only a month later, see <http://epaper.indianexpress.com/233111/Indian-Express/22-February-2014#page/3/1>

<sup>21</sup> Cohen and Dasgupta n.3 p. 5

get underway.<sup>22</sup> Apparently, the IAF opposition came even after the Air Force chief had agreed in the COSC to support the concept of the CDS. However, the IAF has, since, changed its position and now fully supports the concept of the CDS. In the combined commanders' conference of November 2013, Air Chief Marshal N.A.K. Browne, then Chairman COSC, announced in the presence of the Prime Minister that all three services were agreed on the need for a Permanent Chairman COSC. This was subsequently confirmed by Navy chief Admiral D.K. Joshi.<sup>23</sup>

The most intriguing aspect of the situation is the attitude of the political class. The politician-led Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), for example, provided substantial reform ideas in the mid-2000s in the area of internal security.<sup>24</sup> In almost all the reports of the Parliament's Standing Committee on Defence (SCOD), which examined the issue of modernisation and the reforms proposed by the GOM, the Committee strongly backed reform, including the creation of a Chief of Defence Staff to synergise India's defence capabilities.

In many of these ideas, the SCOD, comprising Members of Parliament from a cross-section of the Lok Sabha (the Lower House) and the Rajya Sabha (the Upper House), strongly backed reform, and, indeed, in some instances, went beyond what the GOM suggested or the Naresh Chandra Committee subsequently recommended.<sup>25</sup>

The political class therefore does not appear to be hostile to reform in the national security system of the country. But it would appear that the problem lies with the country's non-specialist bureaucracy. Ever since they were interposed between the armed forces headquarters and the government in the wake of independence, the Ministry of Defence, which is essentially the Defence Minister's civilian staff, has zealously expanded its turf and jealously guarded it.

The world has become exponentially more complex in the last 60 years, but the civil service has resisted any effort to acquire the specialisation required to meet the management challenges of handling India's vast defence establishment. In these years, the armed forces have adapted to new doctrines and organisations built around new weapons systems and threats, and politicians have changed, given the dynamics of society. But the bureaucratic community, sheltered behind arcane Transaction of Business and Allocation of Business rules, has remained more or less unchanged in its training and outlook.<sup>26</sup>

This has happened despite the fact that, in terms of intake, the current crop of civil servants counts among their numbers people who are trained engineers, management graduates, physicians and so on, a far cry from the liberal arts graduates who ruled the roost in the 1950s. The problem seems to reside in the dynamic between the Minister, who is charged with running the Ministry, and the civilian bureaucrats, who are responsible for carrying out his directions. In the

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<sup>22</sup> Shishir Gupta, "Down to Brasstacks," *India Today*, May 28, 2001; also see Rezaul H. Laskar, "IAF chief seeks to delay CDS set up," *Rediff.com*, August 4, 2001, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/aug/04iaf.htm>

<sup>23</sup> Ajai Shukla, "Tri-service chief to be chosen soon," *Business Standard*, December 2, 2013 see also Bhatnagar n. 6

<sup>24</sup> Government of India, Second Administrative Reforms Commission, "Capacity Building for Conflict Resolution: Friction to Fusion" *Seventh Report*, February 2008 p. 205.

<sup>25</sup> Enumerating them is beyond the scope of this report however for some far reaching reforms recommended by both the SCOD and the Estimates Committee see the following reports of the SCOD: Fourteenth Lok Sabha, *Twenty Second Report*, July 2007, p. 63, *Thirty Second Report*, December 2008, pp. 6-12, *Thirty Sixth Report*, February 2009, p. 20; Fifteenth Lok Sabha, *Second Report*, December 2009, p. 4 and 7 and Tenth Lok Sabha, Estimates Committee 1992-1993, "Ministry of Defence: Defence force levels, manpower, management and policy," *Nineteenth Report*, August 1992, p. 80, 32.

<sup>26</sup> In an essay on "Ways of the Bureaucracy," India's leading strategic thinker, himself a former bureaucrat, put it this way, "There ... [is] a mutuality of interest between the politicians and senior civil servants to perpetuate the generalist orientation of the civil service. In such a system of generalist civil servants, senior bureaucrats have no use for outside expertise and feel threatened by it." K. Subrahmanyam with Arthur Monteiro, *Shedding Shibboleths: India's Evolving Strategic Outlook* (Delhi, Wordsmiths, 2005) p. 346.

Westminster system, a minister is not expected to be a subject expert, but those responsible for the functions of the ministry ought to be.<sup>27</sup> The lack of civilian expertise has led to a backlog of problems which afflict India's national security system, primarily its MoD.

Experience from around the world suggests that when it comes to the reform of national security systems, political leadership is a must. The processes that eventually led the U.S. Congress to pass the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 or the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 are a case in point. Here, it must be pointed out that the GOM concept that was adopted by India worked well because it involved the top executive leadership of the country getting directly involved in balancing recommendations made by specialist task forces. In that sense, the Naresh Chandra Committee had less traction since it comprised of expert figures whose report

would then have to cross the hurdles of both the bureaucrat-led ministries as well as the ministers themselves, who operate under the advice of the bureaucrats.

The question then relates to the motives of the UPA government in constituting the NCC as they did. It is not as though the government did not use the innovation of the Group of Ministers concept when it comes to decision making. There have been over 60 GOMs or Empowered Groups of Ministers (EGOMs) at various times. But by creating a committee headed by a bureaucrat and comprising former officials, the government may have actually sought to moderate any thrust towards reform, since it was aware that the recommendations of this committee would have to go through a further processing at the hands of various ministries before being put before the Cabinet Committee on Security for final approval.

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<sup>27</sup> Cohen and Dasgupta n. 3 say that India needs a core cadre of administrators, diplomats and finance officials who specialise in defence. They say that the Indian system "is bad to the degree that while military advice is kept on tap and not on top, civilian lack of expertise permeates the system." pp. 162-163.

## Author's Biography

**Manoj Joshi** is a Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, looking after its National Security Initiative. He has been a journalist specialising on national and international politics and is a commentator and columnist on these issues. As a reporter, he has written extensively on internal security issues as well as relations with Pakistan, China and the United States. He was most recently a member of the Task Force on National Security chaired by Mr Naresh Chandra to propose reforms in the security apparatus of the country. He has been the political editor of *The Times of India* and has worked with other major newspaper groups in India. He has been a member of the National Security Council's Advisory Board and is the author of two books on the Kashmir issue and several papers in professional journals. He has also been a participant in several track 1.5 and track 2 dialogues. He is a graduate of St Stephen's College, Delhi University, and obtained his PhD from the School of International Studies (SIS), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). He has been a Visiting Professor at the SIS, JNU, as well as a Visiting Fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University.

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