

'Defence Planning Committee' – In Conflict with the Role of the MoD?
Re-defining the Role of the MoD

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“The primary function of the national security apparatus of India is to enable the great national task of transforming India into a prosperous, strong and modern country. Our task is to identify, deter and defeat threats to our national security which could prevent India’s transformation”- Shiv Shankar Menon, former NSA while addressing Army War College on August 3, 2015. <http://www.icsin.org/uploads/2017/10/08/b105cc185e5c337f4c1f187706ef4e7b.pdf>

Introduction

Defence reforms in India have been evolutionary rather than revolutionary in nature even though, more often than not driven by events and compulsions. The organisation of Ministry of defence has also accordingly ‘evolved’ over the years. The defining character of the organisation of MoD is that it separates the Armed Forces from the structure of ministry with the exception of Acquisition Wing of DoD. Separation of Armed Forces allows internal autonomy in terms of doctrines, force structures, equipping the forces, internal management and in planning and conduct of operations. However, financial control and oversight functions have always rested with the DoD except in case of operations. There has been devolution of financial powers which too has been evolutionary in nature and perhaps still ‘work in progress.’

Three significant organisations need mention in the context of Higher Direction of War structures within the MoD. First, the ‘Military Wing’, created at the time of Independence initially under the Cabinet Secretariat and later placed under the MoD. The Wing was headed by a Joint Secretary (Military) held in rotation between the three Services by an officer of the rank of Major General or equivalent. Besides acting as a bridge between the senior civil officials and the military leadership, coordinating with other organs of the State, *it provided properly constituted military machinery in the Ministry of Defence which would be in a position to interpret various details relating to defence strategy and process and prepare briefs on all papers relating to defence requiring CCPA approval.* Second, the Defence Planning Staff (DPS) created in 1986. It had senior inter-service staff along with representatives from the MoD, Defence (Finance), MEA and the DRDO. It looked at preparation of *coordinated perspective defence plans, undertook studies on the regions of our military interests, periodic threat assessment and flowing from that, force levels and weaponry to integrate the requirements of the three services.* Both these organisations were merged into HQ IDS on its creation. The third organisation is the HQ IDS. It has capabilities go far beyond the cumulative sum of the two organisations subsumed under it yet significantly, is not a part of MoD but is clubbed along with the Integrated Services HQ.

A significant reform in the realm of HDO is the recent formation of DPC. It is an endeavour to revitalise the structures of national security. It is required to work in the fields of *Policy and strategy; Planning and capability development; Defence diplomacy and Defence manufacturing.* The DPC, has to conceptualise and execute plans in a few broad areas that is to say, *national security strategy; strategic defence review and doctrines; prioritise capability development plans for the armed forces over different time-frames in consonance with the overall priorities, strategies and resource flows; international defence*

engagement strategy; roadmap to build defence manufacturing eco-system and strategy to boost defence exports. The DPC has prioritised three tasks for itself in the short and medium term. These are, first to formulate a National Security Strategy, second, build military infrastructures along India's land and maritime borders and third, create indigenous capability to manufacture ammunition.

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“Defence planning comprises not only operational planning but also important planning for force levels, organising and equipping of the armed forces; all these aspects are inter-related and inter-dependent. Contingency operational planning apart, all defence planning has to be on a steady long term basis; firstly, so that not only is the current security threat is catered for, but also the foreseeable future threats; secondly to ensure that a proper balance is maintained between economic development and defence plans”- HQ IDS Website <http://ids.nic.in/history.htm>

Objective analysis suggests that it might not be appropriate to suggest that DPC is in conflict with the role of MoD as the former is a deliberative body while the latter is an executive body. In fact, it is undertaking tasks like SDR; formulation of doctrines; capability development and force structuring that have traditionally been within purview of the MoD and present them to the Minister of Defence before getting CCS approval. One sees it as an endeavour that gets the stakeholders together at the inception stage itself for better synthesis, shorten the decision loop and infuse accountability and timeliness for both formulation and implementation. Making 'international defence engagement strategy' is an imperative in the context of emergence of India as a major player on the world scene. Its formulation in any case would require inter-ministerial consultations. DPC can emerge as a viable coordinating mechanism for evaluation of higher defence management issues which can then be formalised for execution by the MOD as a follow up.

Issues related to developing roadmap to build defence manufacturing eco-system and strategy to boost defence exports in the modern context characterised by emergence of indigenous private sector capabilities, international collaborations and control regimes needs wider government consultations and strategies. In fact, in this respect more ministries including Home will have to be incorporated while formulating enabling internal and external policies and stratagems. There have been suggestions in the past regarding reviewing if the DPSUs and OFB are appropriately placed under MoD or they should be placed under another Ministry or some other formulation should be put in place. Perhaps, there is a need to re-visit that as well and take a long term view. But, that is a separate subject requiring a deep study and thus is not being debated here.

The DPC is to be supported by HQ IDS. It underscores the capabilities existing within HQ IDS as regards framing policy and strategy on the one hand and undertaking planning and capability development on the other. HQ IDS has the institutional support available to provide inputs to formulate policy for defence diplomacy as well. Unfortunately, these proficiencies were so far not been optimally utilised due to structure and rules of business of MoD. Second point that stands out is inadequacy of current structures within MoD to cope with new realities. It is also axiomatic to infer that neither the MoD nor the NSC has the capabilities to perform these tasks.

Re-defining the Role of the MoD

Imperatives for Examination

There are three imperatives that necessitate a re-look at the role of MoD. The current role of MoD is defined by the 'Rules of Business' and is dated. It requires re-examination to bring in more clarity and make it contemporary. Flowing from the role will be the enablers that will have to be catered for.

The first imperative is to *improve management of defence*; second, need to have the *wherewithal to periodically review the adequacy of force structures that are effective for current and future requirements* and the third, is *optimising budget* that is showing a declining trend due to competing demands of development and increasing aspirations of people.

For improving capacity of the MoD to provide strategic directions and in that, enhancing the quality of advice to the Minister, re-setting the relationship between political executive, military leadership and civilian officials is critical. Start point could be clarifying roles of all the three at policy, strategy and operational levels thereby strengthening decision making. For this enhanced understanding of complexities of civil-military relations is a must. Creation of an eco-system and HR policies for grooming, imparting skills and competencies to security professionals for formulation of defence policy and handling strategic issues both from the military and civil sides is a pre-requisite. There is a need to build capacity to appreciate the nuances of utility of military diplomacy and designing enabling environment is another area that needs a complete re-look.

The second imperative is of 'thought processes and force structures' that are optimised for current and future threats. This is essential in view of the altering nature of threats. An indicative list of new threats would include, dealing with crisis that does not endanger overall national security; intimidations to exploit India's vulnerabilities; operations by adversaries for strategic signalling; multi-domain hybrid threats that degrade response of the Armed Forces and the like. Disconcerting point currently is that single service priorities are pursued and sufficient emphasis on domains which are likely to have significant effect on future operations are perhaps not given their due importance. Domains like ISR, Cyber, Space, Special Operations, Artificial Intelligence, Social Media, Mobile, Analytics, Cloud computing of Big Data, Internet of Things (SMAC) are really not the focus of capability planners. To that end, an all-inclusive view is required to be taken while developing capabilities. This calls for far greater jointness across services, civil services officers, finance experts, scientists, industries, universities and others.

Coming to optimising budget that is showing a declining trend, it is vital that available resources for force development and sustainment are optimised with clear focus on outcomes required at different timelines. This calls for wider government involvement to optimise budget through synergised planning with all stakeholders including States, agencies, private players, academia by enhancing their appreciation of military instrument of power and appreciating benefits that can accrue to them as well by adopting a collaborative approach. This will result in wider partnerships and optimisation of resources for force sustainment and rejuvenation.

Challenges

There are a few challenges that need to be taken into account while embarking upon re-setting the role and enablers for MoD to be responsive to 21st century challenges. First and foremost is, the political executive, barring a handful does not have the knowledge of matters military and are dependent entirely upon inputs from civil service officers who process responses according to their own perceptions on governance and administration. Second, the cultural and behavioural mind-set that resists change coupled with necessity to maintain balance of power between single service organisations and joint organisations. And lastly, lack of continuity at the apex decision making levels which makes strong institutional support system a pre-requisite.

What should the MoD Be?

It should be a strategic hub to support the minister to set directions on defence policy; strategic matters and capability building; issue operational directives; take political risks and must be in sync with wider changes in the national security architecture. Capability building should become its prime focus and a key deliverable. It should engage with other departments and agencies to facilitate cost-effective implementation of defence policy and plans.

Relationship with NSC and other Ministries

NSC should promulgate the National Security Policy, National Security Strategy, National Security Plan and Strategic Intelligence Review. Flowing from that, MoD should formulate Strategic Defence Review, Operational Directive, Defence policy and Defence Strategy. Oversight and moderation on all policy formulations by MoD would be exercised by the NSC before approval by the CCS. NSC should facilitate policy implementation, capability development and manage crisis situations. It should be manned by component staff from the military and skilled civil services that can analyse independently the inputs provided by MoD.

Both MoD and MEA should synergise plans for various contingencies including humanitarian assistance; drive the defence engagement strategy and develop a culture of optimising diplomatic, economic, intelligence and military instruments for achieving national objectives in conjunction with NSC and other organs of the government and civil society. They should develop structures and protocols for synthesised action plans during crisis situations.

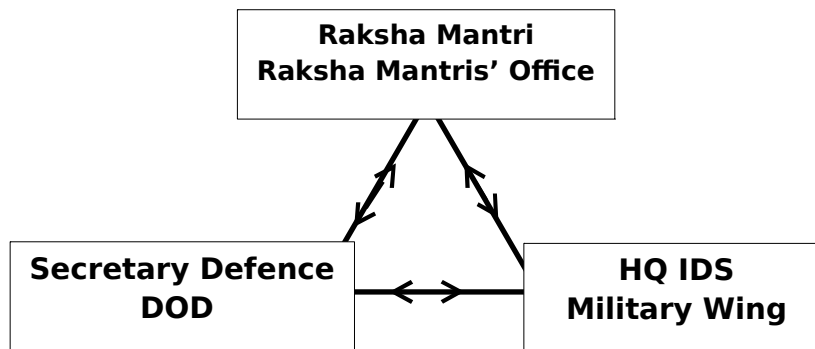
There is clearly defined policy for acting in various contingencies of internal security situations and disaster management. The emergence of new age challenges, require defining processes and controls in terms of employment of the military instrument or assistance to it by agencies and State governments during cyber space attacks and e-crimes and the like. Threats to critical infrastructure; new age threats and terror situation in population centres including CBRN threats and the like require refined policy formulations and protocols.

Enablers

There are three enablers that will impel the new look MoD. The first is jointness and coordination across sectors and services. A prerequisite is vastly improved civil-military relations and cultivation of a culture of working together. Second, is improving skill and knowledge levels among national security professionals including military officers and

ensuring a proper career path for these professionals. The third is reorganising DoD to make it responsive and effective to tackle current and future challenges.

Proposed Organisation



A suitably Staffed RMs' Office should come into being that supports decision making and mediation based on inputs received from DOD, Mil Wing, Single Service, any other Department of MoD, MEA, Defence Finance, NSC and the CCS.

Military Wing of the DoD is to be based on HQ IDS. Besides military professionals its staffing should be a mix to include a few suitably skilled and oriented civil services officers. The military Wing will be responsible for SDR, Op Directive, Def policy guidelines, plans to build capability and Def Strategy. Besides it will undertake the functions of erstwhile Mil Wing and Defence Planning Staff. Military Wing will have direct access to the RM as would the Def Secy as hither-to-fore. There would be lateral communication between Military Wing and DOD on all matters as well. The staffing and grooming for military officers in HQ IDS would require comprehensive deliberations to include career progression and other HR issue.

Empower Service HQ with greater budgetary authority and functional autonomy. Service HQ will undertake capability planning to cover all the three domains of equipment, manpower and training based on the Strategic directions. They will exercise control over the sustainment and infrastructure development budget and processes. Operational focus would continue till alternate structures are put in place.

MoD requires a major change in its approach while dealing with matters placed before it. To that extent, selective induction of military officers may be considered to enhance better appreciation of issues, efficiency and speed of decision making. These military officers should be selected and competent to think environmentally. For starters, model followed in the Acquisition Wing of DoD could act as a guide. Capability development and wider government, agency, industry, collaborative partner and academia outreach should be the prime focus of the MoD.