

Historically, it is to the credit of the Indian Army that it has fulfilled its role as an organ of the state, and undertaken all assigned tasks successfully, except in the Sino-Indian border war of 1962 and reclamation of Indian territory in the Aksai Chin plateau, on the Sino-Indian border in Tibet, for which reasons have to be sought elsewhere. It has functioned effectively in every type of role, in spite of the general lack of a supportive government environment by way of adequate finances, resources, equipment, personnel policies, or higher political direction. The modernization and upgradation of the Indian Army to function in a 21st century environment is, therefore, a priority task for the present as well as successive governments to undertake.

The new millennium opened literally with a thunderclap, as the world witnessed America's new Day of Infamy on live media, with the demolition of the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001, in an air-assault by Al Qaida fidayeen. In his speech to the Congress on September 20, 2001, President George W Bush proclaimed America's 'War on Terror'. In its aftermath, the tensions of the recently terminated Cold War appeared to revive in a different manifestation, which mutated almost seamlessly into the new conflict that spread rapidly outwards, and impacted Afghanistan and Iraq. In fact, the War on Terror seems to have replaced the earlier geo-political confrontation of the Cold War with another worldwide confrontation, this one an ethno-religious clash of cultures (if not of entire civilizations) between neo-con America and Jihadi Islam.

The doctrines of pre-emptive intervention and regime change by the military superpower and high intensity holy war by non-state terrorists are set to overwhelmingly shape the security environment of the new millennium, and will dominate India's perceptions and security stances in at least the middle term future. Numerous local and regional extensions and variations of the conflict have sprung up all over the world, extending from immigrant communities in Europe, all the way to Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines in South East Asia, traversing enroute hotspots in Russia and Eastern Europe, Chechnya, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, as well as other parts of India, and Bangladesh, with branch lines to Chinese Turkestan along the Silk Route. Some of these new wars have subsumed ongoing confrontations, others are taking the form of proxy wars, sub-ethnic insurgencies, terrorism, narcotics, organized crime, illegal migration, environmental poaching, as also high intensity flare-ups over disputed borders, and perhaps with others yet to come (who knows?) involving exclusive economic zones, oil, seabed and water resources. India's relationships with the Peoples' Republic of China, as well as its strategic surrogate Pakistan, have generally been adversarial, but now repairs to these traditional contentions are being attempted. But any attempts at reconstruction will have to take into account the wider context of the new realities of the War on Terror.

To India, these realities will include, amongst others, the massive and seemingly unstoppable 'peaceful rise' of the Middle Kingdom immediately next door, with its unspoken but implicit connotations of military super-capabilities in the not too distant future, the come-back of Islamic jihad in South and South East Asia, the emergence of 'Maobadi' militias in Nepal on India's

doorstep, closely interlinked with their fraternal confederates of the newly consolidated Communist Party of India (Maoist) and other Naxalite affiliates in a nascent Compact Revolutionary Zone, which reaches deep into the Indian heartland. India, shining or not, is nevertheless on its way to be an emerging power whose pluralistic society is under direct attack by the new conflict, which demands the closest attention and can be ignored only at peril; whose ultimate dimensions are as yet unclear. Till that time, there are only wide open questions, difficult, if not impossible to forecast from the present perspective.

Thus, at one extreme, putting a way-out positive spin on the current trends in Indo-Pak and Sino-Indian relations, the possibilities of turning swords into ploughshares appear endless. For instance, with the current upsurge in people-to-people relationships between India and Pakistan and general improvement in the civil environment, could for example a South Asian Federation become a practical reality in 2020, just as the European Union is today, (including, necessarily, resolution of the Kashmir and Siachen problems to the satisfaction of all parties concerned)? Would such a solution emerge as a match winner, or would there still remain some warm embers of national interest, pride and resentments, which would continue to smolder, perhaps requiring to be extinguished later? Would an international border held only by paramilitary forces replace the Line of Control and Actual Ground Position Line?

Ultimately, what impact would all these developments have on the force structure of Army 2020 in terms of mechanized and holding forces for plains and desert warfare; holding forces for the Line of Control and Actual Ground Position Line, and also the ditch-cum-bund and other defense assets and infrastructure painstakingly and painfully developed along the entire front with Pakistan? Also, if and when outstanding issues with the Peoples' Republic of China are resolved on a permanent basis, what would be the end results for forces holding the Line of Actual Control in Northern, Central and Eastern Commands, right from the Kara Koram Pass in extreme northern Ladakh down to Kibithoo in extreme eastern Arunachal Pradesh? On a similar spin, if the internal security situation also improves to the same extent, will civil administrations manage without continuous recourse to the Army as at present, reducing these unpleasant, thankless, and irksome commitments in aid to civil power, perhaps with substantial savings in manpower in terms of the Rashtriya Rifles? Therefore, at the politically upbeat end of the scale, with conflicts, both domestic and international, being resolved, Army 2020 might well evolve into a minimalist organization, lean perhaps to the point of cadaverousness, based primarily on high technology and special forces, supported by airpower, which many today see as a classical model for the new world.

However, there are also more down market perceptions too, whose darker prognoses cannot be totally set aside. Amongst these are the massive and seemingly unstoppable 'peaceful rise' of the Middle Kingdom immediately next door, with its unarticulated but implicit connotations of military super-capabilities; the come-back of Islamic jihad on India's doorstep in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Southeast Asia; the emergence of 'Maobadi' militias in Nepal on India's immediate doorstep, with a corresponding Compact Revolutionary Zone of their fraternal confederates, the People's War Group established deep within the Indian heartland; could all suggest a 'Future History' in much deeper tones of sepia.

Taking an in-between perception of the two extremes, it would be realistic to assume that the

world would perhaps continue to remain an uncertain and uneasy place, where the only certainty would be uncertainty. Threats would be undefined, unexpected and also omnipresent, in shapes and forms, which cannot be visualised clearly at present. Army 2020 will, therefore, have to be designed to function in an amorphous security environment with capabilities to operate across the entire spectrum of conflict from low intensity warfare to the ultimate unthinkable Kurukshetra of nuclear conflict.

Except in the unlikely event of a major reversal turnabout in India's traditional political worldview within the next decade or so, the role of the defense forces in 2020 will remain unchanged from the traditional one of homeland defense – protection of the territorial integrity of Indian territory by land, sea, or air. This will be consistent with the perceptions that all governments in office, regardless of their political philosophies or domestic policy, have taken all along since Independence, in which international military alignments through power blocs, mutual defense treaties, or major expeditionary commitments overseas (except of course on United Nations missions) have been eschewed.

However, the perception of homeland defense has never passively ruled out pro-active or pre-emptive interventions within or outside the country, wherever considered necessary in the national interest, as have been undertaken on numerous occasions earlier by the Indian Army. This cannot, and indeed must not be wished away or forgotten. Military intervention in the national interest, to consolidate and nurture the fledgling nation, commenced almost immediately after Independence and through the early years of the Republic, with operations in the (then) princely states of Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Junagadh. The historical process continued with the assimilation of Portuguese colonies in 1961, absorption of the Sikkim Monarchy, assistance and support to the brutalized people of East Pakistan – now Bangladesh – in 1971, attempted peacemaking in Sri Lanka in 1987-1990, the Maldives in 1988, or more recently, the carefully harmonised anti-insurgency operations with Myanmar and Bhutan against separatist elements along contiguous border areas. Similar contingencies may arise in the future as well, and there is no need to be in any manner apologetic about them, though some ventures can certainly be criticized for incoherent political direction and poor military planning. In addition, the Indian Army has also very successfully displayed its capabilities for operations other than war (OOW) in these regions by way of training missions and assistance in natural calamities, whenever requested by the host countries. Such contingencies could very well arise in future too.

Viewed from the final months of 2004, Indian Army 2020 is only fifteen years ahead on the timeline, within the current 15-Year Defense Perspective, and not really all that distant at all in terms of successive Five Year Defense Plans. The building of the New Army is, therefore, already in progress with the ongoing Tenth, and the future Eleventh, Twelfth and Thirteenth Five Year Defense Plan series. If these proceed even approximately on schedule (which incidentally, has almost never been the case!), Army 2020 should be in place within the Thirteenth Five Year Defense Plan (2017-2022). But defense planning has traditionally been low on the scale of national priorities, with myriad hurdles in the process of planning, decision-making and production. Political decision-making and effective follow through action by the government have been glacial in terms of results actually achieved. Desperate attempts to expedite the process, even during national emergencies like Kargil 1999, ultimately backfired into low grade,

ill informed and crudely partisan political confrontations around the Tehalka sting operation, the CAG Report, and the so-called Coffin-gate scandals, which rocked the political firmament of the time. Their spill-over effect severely inhibited the official decision-making process, and perhaps damaged it beyond repair. The evolution of Army 2020 will have to live with this and evolve as best as it can. The crux of the issue, as always, will be sustained availability of adequate finances. Finance ministers controlling the nation's purse strings (including in the current dispensation) generally do not look benignly on resources diverted from the national kitty towards defense, and dole them out grudgingly at the best of times. Plans for Indian Army 2020, integrated into the overall perspective of the Defense Services, are therefore, critically interlinked with the national effort in terms of resources likely to be allotted, as also to timely political and financial decision making. This is likely to be a fluctuating process, very much influenced by the course of geo-political and economic developments, as well as political philosophies and attitudes of future governments regarding adequate and sustained financial support for defense planning. All these imponderables would impact heavily on the Defense Plan series, and therefore, on the profile of Army 2020, but in what manner and to what effect, remain questions only the future can answer. Meanwhile, an almost continuous flow of revolutions in military affairs has been underway for over two decades now, which should certainly be incorporated into the profile of Army 2020.

The Indian Army has traditionally been manpower intensive, which many modern intellects disparage as a hangover from the Second or even the First World War era. But it must be understood that these apparent anachronisms linger on even at present, due to certain economic as well as operational compulsions. At one level, the inability of the Indian Army to shed manpower is due to lack of resources to replace it with high-end technologies, primarily because of the generally low priority accorded to defense planning, and inadequate resource allotment. In the absence of equipment, manpower intensive alternatives, somehow have to persist almost by default. The unsatisfactory hybridization, which created the current Reorganized Army Plains Infantry Division – RAPID – is a good example of this. In this case, the divisional structure was reduced by a brigade, on the assumption that manpower thus reduced would be replaced by force multipliers and surveillance. Needless to say, the Army waited for these in vain, because the financial resources for the technological makeover were simply never allotted. It is to be seen whether these difficulties will persist in future as well. By present indications, it seems that they would still be around for quite some time. At another level, mountain and jungle terrain in the northern and eastern regions combined with extensive deployments on counter insurgency, established operational imperatives for organizations with adequate manpower. Here, sheer technology, though helpful, was not the dominating factor, and there was no substitute for numbers of well-trained 'boots on the ground', as American forces in Iraq are painfully learning the hard way. So, in New Age organizations, manpower versus technology will have to be implemented carefully and judiciously. At present, there is an intense debate within the military and the rest of the strategic community on the shape of warfare in the future, and the type of army required to meet future threats. Will a traditional conventional army, even if technologically upgraded, be adequate to handle these when they occur? Now that the process of re-construction is already under way, what kind of an Army 2020 should emerge at the end of it? How and to what extent will it or can it reflect the operational compulsions of that future time? The answer to these and other similar questions must be clearly understood, which is that Indian Army 2020 must retain the basic configuration

of a conventional army, and not be mutated by radical doctrinal surgery into some kind of heavy constabulary. The New Army must possess integral multi-role operational capabilities across the entire spectrum of conflict, whether nuclear, conventional, or low intensity. Any undue emphasis or insistence on a tailor-made orientation focusing primarily on any particular level of warfare would be dangerously misplaced. To effectively undertake its task of land warfare for homeland defense, India requires a large army, with an armory ranging from land-launched strategic weapons at the high intensity end of the spectrum, to special operations forces at the low intensity end. The middle levels will continue to be bulked out by conventional forces, with adequate manpower – armor, artillery, infantry, as well as integral army aviation, backed up by the requisite support and logistics elements. The basic organizations of the Army require extensive technological upgradation, but are otherwise stable and time-tested under a wide variety of environments. They are flexible enough for structured regrouping for various contingencies. Changes to the existing pattern should be introduced only after careful deliberation.

Amongst other emerging factors are strategic weapons systems, which are still a comparatively recent acquisition and whose command and control methodologies are yet to be fully stabilized. The Strategic Forces Command has been recently established as the designated inter-services agency for overall management of these high-end assets. The new organization is logical and was originally scheduled to function directly under the much awaited Chief of Defense Staff, but since this appointment is yet to be implemented, it has now been placed de facto under the Chiefs of Staff Committee, through the Integrated Defense Staff. It still remains to be seen how the final shape of the new Command emerges, i.e. whether in the classical sense of a separate command with direct control of operational, logistics, and personnel, or as a functional command for operational employment of dedicated strategic components held with each individual Service. In the Indian context, perhaps the latter would be more practicable. However, whatever the command structure model ultimately adopted, it must also be optimally calibrated to fulfill the important aspect of 'command satisfaction' within its hierarchy, an aspect not often considered, or, if so, ignored or disregarded. Each Service operates in its own physical environment, and land-based strategic systems are within the Army's domain. Army 2020 must incorporate an integral component of strategic forces, which can be operationally emplaced under the Strategic Forces Command.

A word about Army Aviation, which must be another vital area of focus for Army 2020. Airpower dominates the battlefield, and must be employed to achieve maximum synergy. However, in the inter-services context, this eminently profound article of faith has been allowed to acquire an extended meaning of single service ownership of all air assets. To the Army, airpower is essentially firepower, surveillance and target acquisition from the sky in close or distant support of ground operations extending up to the operational depth of the tactical battle area. Given the advances in technology, these tasks can now be undertaken by manned as well as unmanned flight platforms, covering a range of unmanned air vehicles / remotely piloted vehicles (UAV / RPV), ground launched precision-guided missiles, and rotary wing ground combat aviation (attack and assault helicopters). These aerial platforms operate primarily in the environment of the land battle, either independently or in a supplementary role to the air battle, often without diverting high-end airpower from its primary tasks. Army 2020 will have to build up integral air resources for itself, particularly in rotary winged combat aircraft (attack and assault helicopters,

Indian Army 2020

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airborne early warning, communications and medevac) integral to Army Aviation, which must become the primary agency of rotary wing airpower.

But for all this to be effective within the given timeframe raises the vital issue of the attitudinal and cultural reorientation of the defense forces into a synergized joint-service environment. While acknowledging the supreme importance of individual Service identities and aspirations, by 2020, the Indian Army individually, as well as the Defense Forces collectively, must no longer be allowed to function as independent disconnected entities, without the required inter-service synergy for fullest exploitation of their respective capabilities. Army 2020 will, therefore, have to be organized, equipped, trained and culturally energized to take its place within an operational triad in conjunction with maritime and aerospace power, functionally interlinked through an integrated politico-military Higher Defense Organization, and a common framework of joint-service doctrines and joint command structures. It takes three to tango, but nevertheless unless the joint services environment is simultaneously developed and implemented, Army 2020 (as indeed Navy 2020 or Air Force 2020) cannot be employed to its fullest capability and effect. In some senses, provision of an enabling environment of jointmanship (a clumsy term!) and stamping them on the individual ethos and culture of each Service may well be the most challenging task, which should be accorded an overall priority higher than many other issues. In this context, the major area of reconstruction of Indian Army 2020 (and the other Services) might well be in reform of traditional mindsets and approach to battle.

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