



Professional Military Education: The First Steps in the Indian Context

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November 30, 2010

Summary

Military leaders must think critically, demonstrate professional acumen, and, above all, lead the rank and file in dangerous and difficult situations. As such, the militaries cannot be complacent when it comes to producing combat leaders capable of meeting the challenges and threats at the tactical, operational and strategic levels. It is increasingly becoming important to invest in professional military education (PME) to groom officers capable of meeting the rigours of complex politico-military crises and conflicts of the future. The recent proposal to create the Indian National Defence University (INDU) under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to meet the professional needs of the three services is therefore a step in the right direction. In addressing this challenge, there are several issues that might need serious attention. None perhaps is as important as the selection and fielding of a multi-disciplinary faculty. This Brief examines the issue at three levels: broad planning considerations; a proposed faculty structure; and the initial steps required to evolve a vibrant faculty. It argues that the real test will lie in creating a professional advisory board, a multi-disciplinary faculty, and a fair mix of military and civilian professorship that induces richness and rigour in Indian military thinking of the future.

Backdrop

Military leaders must think critically, communicate well, demonstrate professional acumen, and above all lead the rank and file in dangerous and difficult situations. Militaries therefore cannot be complacent when it comes to producing combat leaders capable of meeting challenges at the tactical, operational and strategic level. As a matter of national security interest, it is imperative to invest in professional military education (PME) to train and develop officers capable of meeting the rigours of complex politico-military contingencies and conflicts in the future. The proposal to create an Indian National Defence University (INDU) under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence (MoD), cleared at an estimated cost of Rs. 265 Crore in May 2010, to meet the professional military education needs of the three services will address this deficiency in the long term.

In addressing this challenge, there are several structural and procedural issues that need attention. None perhaps is as important as the selection and fielding of a multi-disciplinary faculty at the defence university. This brief examines the issue at three levels: broad planning considerations; a proposed faculty structure; and the initial steps necessary to evolve a vibrant military and civilian faculty.

Planning Considerations

Human resources will remain a critical element to any professional military education system. It is therefore important to carefully select the senior leadership, the faculty, and the managerial staff. If the principal focus at INDU is to train future military thinkers, strategists and decision makers, the range and quality of the civilian and military faculty will assume salience. Three aspects are highlighted here: the curriculum, the strength of the faculty, and the institutional best practices.

Curriculum: The size, shape and structure of the civilian and military faculty will be driven by the curriculum defined at INDU. It would be important to structure the faculty thematically to meet these objectives. The departments of research can be organised at four broad levels: area studies, strategic studies; international relations; and quantitative studies. First, area studies will look at the military perspectives of countries in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood. Second, strategic studies should cover a wide range of defence issues including war and strategy, force structuring and modernisation, military readiness and logistical sustenance, research and development, and budgeting and acquisitions. Third, the training on global perspectives in terms of India's grand strategy and foreign policy should be covered through studies in the field of international relations and international political economy. And fourth, subjects such as game theory, war gaming and simulations, etc. could be placed under the head of quantitative studies.

Faculty strength: The curriculum and the departmental format adopted will shape the number of civilian and military professors required at INDU and not vice versa. Any of the four faculties suggested above and organised on a multi-disciplinary format will not require more than ten to twelve professors. As an exception the department on strategic and quantitative studies may require a few extra teaching staff

– perhaps another half a dozen professors. If it is assumed that a minimum of 10 students are allotted to each professor, then it would suggest that some 600 officers would be trained on an annual basis. A fair relationship therefore needs to be established between the number of programmes likely to be offered, the number of students likely to subscribe to them, and the number of professors required.

Institutional best practices: An appraisal of the academic best practices and guidelines may be important to promote INDU as a world class institution. Three important aspects in this regard are discussed here. First, the nature of academic rigour desired at INDU will determine the desired competencies among the faculty staff - civilian and military. The demands of academic rigour can be examined at multiple levels: the challenge of the PME curriculum; the minimum entry standards; the performance levels; and the course deliverables. A challenging course curriculum and well researched deliverables can ensure institutional rigour. In this context, it may be worthwhile to examine the American and British approaches – the former believes in extensive course work while the latter is less reliant on course work. This in turn would shape the duration of courses. American doctorate programmes typically run over five years as against British programmes that last only two to three years. This would affect the type of courses and the competence levels required of the faculty employed – both civilian and military - to deliver on the training objectives.

Second, a fair diversity in the levels of academic expertise within the civilian and military faculty is essential. This will have to be achieved through an institutional balance between the enduring and emerging subject matters. For instance, sub-conventional warfare may demand more attention than conventional warfare and, therefore, the influence of academic competencies within a faculty. At yet another level, inter-agency or inter-governmental working may need more military emphasis over service-specific doctrines and strategies. The diversity in the faculty structure especially in the field of non-traditional security would assume importance in the emerging security context. In addition to civilian academics and military officers, there is also a need to recruit retired diplomats, bureaucrats, law and order experts, intelligence experts, legal experts, and technocrats to add to the diversity of courses and curriculum.

Third, the quality of faculty will require a balance of number of vacancies between civilian and military professors. Civilian professors are most concerned about obtaining tenure while career progression is important to military officers. In other words, balancing the institutional requirements of curriculum development and teaching, research and publishing, and institutional outreach between the two intakes would become extremely critical. At yet another level, a mix of issues such as emoluments, academic freedom, tenure stability and career progression would influence the quality of any PME system in the future. A well crafted outreach programme with academic universities and policy oriented research think tanks within the country and abroad will contribute to the overall quality of INDU scholarship.

And fourth, there is a need to define the nature of student intake. The student body forms the bedrock of any PME institution as many among them in turn will make contributions their profession and the military as institution. The institution will

benefit from the presence of both – military and civilian students. The armed forces will have to decide on the intake levels at the junior, intermediate and senior levels. There could be several ways of doing this, but most importantly it can be organised at three levels: through a competitive exam(s) or an interview for course programmes in strategic and international studies; based on the past course performance(s) in case of area and quantitative studies; and a few open vacancies for those on sabbatical. The INDU should also offer slots to civilian scholars coming from national and foreign universities, MoD officials, and other support agencies working under the MoD. A few vacancies can be reserved for international students and individuals from the defence industry.

Broadly speaking, a range of planning parameters will have to be thought through at the structural and systemic level in order to build a capable and high quality faculty at INDU. The aspects discussed above are mere pointers in the larger debate towards establishment of the INDU.

Structure and Shape

In terms of the faculty structure and scholarship, the PME system will have to be structured at three principal levels: the directorial staff, the provosts and deans, and the faculty.

Directorial staff: Quality leadership at the INDU will have to start at the highest level. This necessitates that the senior level directorial staff – designated as presidents or commandants or directors - must have strong academic credentials as well as sound military expertise to establish rapport with the civil-military teaching faculty and the student body. It will be important that the Chiefs of Staff Committee establishes clear criteria such as demonstrated educational and academic work for selecting the INDU directorial heads – civilian or military - at the seniormost level. If these heads were to be from the military alone, then there will be a need to balance out their career progression needs as against their institutional longevity. In effect, the principle of “tombstone” promotions may have to be applied to retain some of the accomplished military staff in these positions. A visionary directorial staff would be essential in the incipient years of INDU.

Provosts and Deans: There will be a need to appoint provosts and deans with sufficient academic experience and managerial expertise to manage the permanent or visiting faculty and the student body. Whether military or civilian, the deans or provosts should possess a PhD or a terminal degree in a field that is relevant to national security studies, and, most importantly, he or she should be well respected among his or her peers. In case of a civilian appointee, he or she must have some exposure to the military environment and in management and supervision of large organisations.

Faculty: The teaching faculty will be the determinant factor in the quality of military education. The importance of a competent, credible and dedicated faculty therefore cannot be overstated. The need for quality will define the selection of the faculty members under each departmental head. While the military officers would among the best candidates in their own field, the civilian academics will compete within the

national universities and think tanks to staff the INDU faculty.

Faculty Composition

Salient aspects in this regard can be discussed at two levels: the military and the civilian faculty.

Military faculty: The intake of the military faculty could be considered at three levels. First, military field commanders who have recent and relevant operational experience but may not possess advanced degrees or flair for teaching. Second, those military officers who have advanced degrees in specialist fields but no formal teaching experience (other than Category A or B training establishment experience). And third, those military officers who possess advanced degrees or niche subject matter expertise and teaching experience. It is quite obvious that while the first category would be available in abundance, there will be a need to invest in substantial scholarship over time in the second and third categories of military officers. This will entail detailing of a sufficient number of military officers for higher studies in select universities within the country and abroad. This would have to commence with immediate effect for diverse academic disciplines in the select rank categories. At yet another level, the initial shortfall in military professors could be filled by recruiting retired military officers who have requisite qualifications and expertise to fill in these slots. As and when this pool of professors from the serving officer community is built up, the intake of retired officers could be reduced. This cadre will have to be built by according sufficient opportunities to serving officers to do Masters and PhD programmes. However, this will have to be balanced against the demands of the military profession and career progression. It may not always be organisationally possible to accord first a three to five year long sabbatical to obtain an academic degree and thereafter make an officer available to INDU on a tenure basis.

Civilian faculty: There could be several ways of hiring civilian faculty under a PME system. At the outset, it would be important to define the quality of civilian faculty required and above all the requisite compensation to attract quality academics. One would require a range of civilian proficiencies at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of teaching. At the strategic level, the importance of terminal degrees and/or niche specialisations among the civilian professors cannot be ignored. A doctorate backed with reasonable amount of published work both at the national and international level should be the minimum acceptable qualification. On the other hand, a Masters degree in specific fields may suffice for the several other PME courses run at the operational or tactical level. The civilian faculty will have to be tenure based and compensated on equitable terms as far as pay and allowances are concerned. Since it may not be always possible to find accomplished and high quality academics on a tenure basis, the shortfall could be addressed by employing short term visiting professors or adjuncts, and much of it simply based on their spoken reputation. Of course, the short term assignments would not involve a mentoring role unlike the tenured professors, and therefore would have to be chosen with care. It is also important that short term assignments should not become a substitute for long term training needs under a PME system.

The development and fielding of an NDU faculty may not be so easy as there are several issues that may need a detailed examination. These would include the faculty selection process, the appraisal system, the academic freedom and copyright accorded especially to the civilian professors, and above all their role play in faculty development and research. A delicate balance will have to be evolved between the directorial staff, deans and provosts, and the civilian and military professors. Issues of administrative support staff and research assistants at various levels will be equally important.

Outlining the First Steps

Given the fact that the INDU is to commence functioning in the medium future, the tentative action plan for the creation of the faculty is discussed below.

- Set up an advisory board comprising of eminent academics and military experts to recommend the shape, size and structure of the INDU faculty. The board may be tasked to make broad recommendations in terms of the faculty structure, staffing pattern, course curriculum, and compensation.
- Based on the recommendations made by this board, the key issues can be further analysed for detail by conducting internal seminars and discussions. This will help clarify the several organisational concerns with regard to the constitution of the faculty at the inter- and intra- service levels.
- Set up a steering committee to define the organisational policy on the following issues:
 - Course(s) to be conducted.
 - Course curriculum.
 - Faculty Structure.
 - Staffing pattern.
 - Selection and retention.
 - Pay and compensation.
 - Bilateral & Visiting Fellowship.
 - Research and Publication
- The identification and short listing of officers for the Masters and PhD programmes within and outside the country. The advisory board members could perhaps be approached to accept the first lot of officers proceeding on these programmes at their respective universities.

- Evolve an admissions board under the aegis of HQ IDS to enable smooth selection, detailment and management of the students for the military, civilian and international vacancies at INDU.
- Creation of skeleton faculty structures comprising a Head of Research and minimal support staff with a view to develop the curriculum, office procedures and regulations.
- Undertake recruitment of the faculty under existing governmental procedures. Special dispensations may have to be sought for international teaching faculty.

It would be important that INDU leans on the best scholarship available on strategic and international studies within the country and from abroad to determine the faculty structures, course work, research and university best practices that are comparable to premier PME institutions across the world. A consultancy to address a range of faculty development issues may be in order after the macro views of the advisory board have been duly considered.

Conclusion

An institution such as the NDU which is designed to develop military and civilian scholarship on a wide range of national security issues will have to be treated as an institution of strategic value within the country. It will therefore entail detailed planning and coordination, and expertise for which may not be readily available within the three services. A colloquium in the form of an acclaimed advisory board would be essential to fashion the first steps towards the establishment of the INDU.