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India's Special Forces An Appraisal

*Amit Kumar**

At a time when the battlefield has been progressively transforming from the conventional to unconventional, the role of Special Forces will become critical in shaping its outcome. Conflicts in the past decade have established the primacy of such forces. Their role has evolved and today special operations are meant to be decisive and achieve strategic objectives. The Indian security establishment has also been taking notice of these changes and by and large making right moves. As India embarks on the path of high economic growth and becomes a power to reckon with, its troubled neighborhood poses the biggest challenge to it. The role of Special Forces will thus be critical in outwitting adversaries' moves in the neighborhood and areas of India's strategic interests, and in promoting India's security.

Generally, in battle, use the normal force to engage; use the extraordinary to win.

– Sun Tzu

Unconventional security threats pose the biggest challenge before the world today.¹ They have thrown open new challenges for security establishments across the world which are struggling to come to terms with this relatively recent phenomenon. Thus, the role of Special Forces assumes significance in the backdrop of 'unconventional is conventional'. Special Forces are well equipped to undertake missions to tackle unconventional security threats. Moreover, Special Forces can also be used as a strategic tool in both

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conventional and unconventional warfare. The role of the United States (US) Special Forces in the asymmetric and counter-insurgent warfare environment of Iraq and Afghanistan recently, and in the elimination of Osama bin Laden in 2011, aptly demonstrates the efficacy of these forces in dealing with unconventional security threats and achieving strategic objectives.²

Like many other countries, India is also facing a host of unconventional security challenges. Terrorism, Left-wing extremism (LWE) and insurgency are some of the biggest security concerns of the Indian state. Though these security challenges are primarily internal security problems which should be dealt with by police forces, one should not forget that there is also an external dimension to all these, which limits the role of police forces and brings the Special Forces into the picture. These forces can be charged with specific tasks as part of special operations. It could range from targeting operational assets of the hostile forces to achieving some strategic objectives. The Indian experience shows that deployment of Special Forces in internal crises has also proved to be beneficial. Moreover, there is a growing chorus among India's strategic community that it is high time for India to don the role of at least a regional security provider.³ The Government of India (GoI) has also sent feelers indicating that India is not averse to this idea,⁴ given the kind of prevailing security scenario in India's neighbourhood and beyond.⁵ Such role playing also becomes important in view of the fact that our burgeoning economy, which is increasingly being shaped by circumstances outside its borders, needs a safe and secure environment to prosper further. Special Forces are likely to play a very important role if India decides to assume such a role in order to promote regional stability and safeguard its own national interest.

The Indian military's *Joint Doctrine for Special Forces Operations* envisages key role for Special Forces across the theatre of conflicts: strategic, operational or tactical.⁶ However, it is worthwhile to mention here that though our Special Forces have evolved over time and emerged as a potent force, the government needs to focus on developing their capabilities as potent force multipliers to face more challenging and daunting tasks ahead. Our Special Forces have to come to terms with rapid advances made in the field in order to stay relevant.

It is in this context that an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of India's Special Forces becomes essential. This article attempts to analyse India's Special Forces with a view to make them more effective and relevant

pursuant with our national objectives and conversant with the evolving concept of Special Forces in an era of 'unconventional is conventional'. The article is organized as follows: the next section deals with the concept and meaning, followed by a discussion on Special Forces in India. The penultimate section is a critique of India's Special Forces followed by the conclusion.

CONCEPT AND MEANING

Special Forces in their present form emerged in the early 20th century, with a significant growth in the field during the World War II. Special Forces are military units trained to perform unconventional missions. The US Department of Defense publication defines Special Forces as 'forces organized, trained, and equipped to conduct special operations with an emphasis on unconventional warfare capabilities.'⁷ The same document defines special operations as:

operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk.⁸

Thus, if we read these two definitions in conjunction: Special Forces are specifically organized, trained and equipped to conduct and support special operations. Special Forces' operations can be conducted independently or in conjunction with operations of conventional forces or other security agencies.

The meaning and role of Special Forces envisioned in the doctrines of the three services, the National Security Guard (NSG) Act, the Special Protection Group (SPG) Act and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force (ITBPF) Act, apart from the operating principles of Special Forces of other relevant agencies, by and large correspond with the above-mentioned description of Special Forces. The *Indian Army Doctrine* (2004) defines Special Forces as:

specially selected troops who are trained, equipped and organized to operate in hostile territory, isolated from the main combat forces. They may operate independently or in conjunction with other forces at the operational level. They are versatile, have a deep reach and can make precision strikes at targets of critical importance.⁹

The document conceives a broad range of roles for the Special Forces. During conventional war, strategic and tactical surveillance of vital targets, early warning of enemy activity in depth areas, denying strategic or operational assets and terminal targeting by precision munitions could be its role. In low-intensity conflicts, it could be assigned 'seek and destroy' missions, including transborder operations. Special Forces during peacetime can be assigned the task of hostage rescue, anti-terrorist operations, and assistance to friendly foreign governments. The Indian Navy recognizes Special Forces as potent force multipliers and developing the capabilities of its Special Forces has been a priority area for the navy over past few years. The *Indian Maritime Doctrine 2004* defines Special Forces as 'elite units designed to function in areas that are hostile, defended, remote, or culturally sensitive.'¹⁰ Delving on its role, the document says:

Special operations cover a vast variety of missions from intelligence gathering, presence in enemy areas, feeding villagers after a disaster to training soldiers of a friendly power to fight. Special Forces may also conduct clandestine raids as part of specific missions. They may engage in anti-terrorist and anti-narcotics actions or wage psychological warfare.¹¹

According to the Indian Air Force (IAF) Doctrine (2012), 'Special Forces are highly trained and are equipped to carry out specific operations, in offensive and defensive roles. They operate in small numbers but the payoffs from a successful operation are generally much higher given the size of the forces involved.'¹² The IAF envisages primarily offensive role for its Special Forces. Some of the important roles for IAF Special Forces as per the document are:

1. combat and peacetime search and rescue missions;
2. counterterrorism;
3. destruction and degradation of enemy air assets (DEAA);
4. special missions in the interest of IAF, sister services and the nation;
5. protection of IAF high-value assets; and
6. emergency response force.

The given analysis clearly brings out the special characteristics of Special Forces. These forces are not only potent force multipliers but also a decisive force in their own capacity. By virtue of their training, they can multitask. They can be used across the theatre of conflicts, whether internal or external, both as a force multiplier and a strategic asset. The

analysis also highlights the commonality of thinking in the Indian armed forces about the versatile role of Special Forces and importance of joint operations. Moreover, an analysis of the roles and functions of Special Forces shows that counterterrorism is a primary and one of the most important tasks of our Special Forces.

Though counterterrorism remains a critical activity of the Special Forces, their role has evolved to help the government enhance stability, prevent conflict and also, to be prepared to fight and defeat adversaries when necessary. The major difference between special operations of the past and today is that now the special operations are also meant to be decisive and achieve strategic objectives.¹³

SPECIAL FORCES IN INDIA

The number of Special Forces in India is significantly large. The Indian armed forces have their own designated Special Forces. In addition, the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) also have their specialized units which come under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Some Special Forces work directly under the Cabinet Secretariat. Apart from these, Special Forces have been created at the state level primarily for counterterrorism. Maharashtra has taken lead in this regard. A brief overview of the existing Special Forces in India is given next.

Military Units

Army

The Indian Army has a total of 13 Special Forces battalions: eight PARA (SF) and five PARA (Airborne) battalions for surveillance, target designation, counterterrorism, out-of-area contingencies, surgical strikes, and hit-and-run operations. Additionally, the Indian Army is raising two new PARA (SF) battalions. The raising of the first new PARA (SF) battalion will be completed by 2015, while the second will be in place by 2017–18. Concurrently, the army is also in the process of modernizing its existing 13 battalions, each with around 620 soldiers, apart from training them in Chinese and other foreign languages. The Indian Army Special Forces have considerable battle experience, and also carry out periodic joint training with their foreign counterparts.¹⁴

Navy

The Marine Commando Force (MCF), also known as MARCOS, is a

Special Forces unit that was raised by the Indian Navy in 1987 for direct action, special reconnaissance, amphibious warfare, and counterterrorism. An elite special operations unit that is strictly kept out of the public eye by the Navy, the MARCOS is capable of carrying operations in all the three domains—air, sea and land—though maritime missions are their specialization. It presently has approximately more than 1,000 personnel, though its actual strength remains classified.

Operations undertaken by MARCOS usually remain classified, though some that are known are: Operation Pawan (1987), Operation Cactus (1988), and Operation Muffetin Somalia (1992–93). MCF is among one of the few units in the world that is capable of para-dropping into the sea with full combat load and equipment. It has also been assisting in counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) where the marine commandos have been deployed at the Wular Lake.¹⁵

Air Force

The latest to become a part of military Special Forces are the Garuds of IAF. The force was established in 2004 and has been organized on the lines of the para commandos of the Indian Army. The strength of the force ranges between 1,500 and 2,000. They have been undertaking protection of critical IAF bases and installations, search and rescue during peace and hostilities, anti-hijack and counter-insurgency operations and disaster relief during calamities.¹⁶ They are also trained to operate behind enemy lines in the event of a war.

Special Forces under MHA

National Security Guard (NSG)

NSG was raised on 16th October 1985 as a Federal Contingency Force under MHA to tackle all facets of terrorism in the country. Thus, the primary role of this force is to combat terrorism in all forms, especially in areas where terrorist activity assumes serious proportions and the state police and other central police forces find themselves unable to cope with the situation.

NSG is specially equipped and trained to deal with specific situations and, therefore, is to be used only in exceptional situations. It has two complementary elements in the form of the Special Action Group (SAG), comprising army personnel, and the Special Rangers Group (SRG), comprising personnel drawn from the CAPF/state police force. NSG is a

100 per cent deputationist force, with 53 per cent of its manpower drawn from the army and 47 per cent from CAPFs/state police organizations.¹⁷ NSG commandos can shoot the enemy even in total darkness. Recently, women commandos have also been inducted by the NSG. Significantly, NSG has created a new commando category—the Phantom category—consisting of personnel equipped with the best of the combatant skills, both armed and unarmed. Only 1 per cent of the total force in NSG can achieve Phantom status. At the attainment of this status, the commando is removed from the NSG training centre at Manesar and taken to some classified ultra-secret location for a new kind of training regimen.¹⁸ Out of its strength of 10,000 plus personnel, NSG has dedicated only about 600 commandos for VIP security.¹⁹

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)

As per the approval of GoI, Commando Battalions for Resolute Action (CoBRA) force for guerrilla/jungle warfare-type operations for dealing with extremists, insurgents, etc., has been set up. The government had accorded sanction for raising of 10 unattached battalions of CoBRA in CRPF. All 10 CoBRA battalions have been raised in phased manner and have started functioning.²⁰

Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force (ITBPF)

This is a specialized mountain force and most of the officers and men are professionally trained mountaineers and skiers.²¹ It is the only police force in the country which possesses expertise in policing the most formidable mountains of the Himalayas.

Special Forces under the Cabinet Secretariat

Special Protection Group (SPG)

The SPG is the most elite, nodal protection agency of the Government of India. In the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the government set up the SPG on 30 March 1985. On 2 June 1988, the SPG Act was passed by Parliament. The SPG Act, 1988 provides for the constitution and regulation of an armed force of the Union for providing proximate security to the Prime Minister of India and former prime ministers of India and members of their immediate families and for matters connected therewith. SPG comprises around 3,500 trained personnel, mostly drawn from police and CAPFs such as Border Security

Force (BSF), CRPF, ITBPF and CISE. It works under the control of Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India.²²

Special Frontier Force (SFF)

SFF was the first Special Force of independent India. Special Frontier Force or Establishment 22 (pronounced Two-Two), created in the aftermath of the 1962 India–China War, had mostly exiled Tibetans for ‘behind-enemy-lines activities’ in China in the event of a war. The main mission of SFF was, and remains, stirring up guerrilla operations against China in Tibet. Given the sensitive nature of the force, SFF acts in a highly secretive environment. Based in Uttarakhand, this force operates directly under the Cabinet Secretariat. The current SFF force level is around 10,000 men.²³

Special Forces under State Governments

Force One

Force One is Maharashtra’s counter-terror unit created in 2009 in the wake of 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai. It is an elite force formed on the lines of NSG. Force One was formed to reduce the response time in case of terror attacks as it had taken 9 hours for the NSG to fly to Mumbai to take charge of the troubled sites during 26/11 terror attacks in the city.²⁴

Anti-terrorism Squad (ATS)

Although ATS exists in many states, that in the state of Maharashtra excels over others in this regard. It was created in 2004 by the Government of Maharashtra to counter the menace of terrorism. It aims at collecting and collating information about anti-national elements working in any part of the state. It works in coordination with central agencies, like Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW). ATS also keeps in touch with similar agencies of other states.²⁵

Miscellaneous

Parliament Duty Group (PDG)

An exclusive, specially trained paramilitary unit armed with the latest gadgets and weaponry has now been deployed for security of India’s Parliament House complex. The team, drawn from the best trained men and women of the CRPF, has been named Parliament Duty Group (PDG). The creation of PDG was mooted in the aftermath of the 13

December 2001 terror attack on the Indian Parliament. The strength of the new squad is 1,540 personnel. The personnel have successfully completed commando and tactical training and are also adept in dealing with nuclear and bio-chemical emergencies. The unit functions under the operational command of the Additional Secretary (Security) of Parliament House, with the overall in-charge being the Director General of CRPF.²⁶

A CRITIQUE OF INDIA'S SPECIAL FORCES

The previous section shows that India has a sizable presence of Special Forces to cater to a wide variety of security tasks. But it would be an overstatement to say that we have used their services optimally. Therefore, the question that naturally arises is: what are the problems/challenges that limit the ability to use Special Forces in a desired manner? This section identifies and analyses some key issues in the functioning of the Special Forces.

Doctrinal Challenges

Special Forces, though important across the entire conflict spectrum, need to be primarily employed strategically on politico-military missions to secure strategic objectives of national importance. However, India's present security narrative, which is dominated by conventional military operations, does not envisage such a role for Special Forces despite revolutionary changes in the context and conduct of warfare. There is an agreement among the security experts that Special Forces must be organized, equipped and trained to undertake tasks of strategic nature. In his seminal study, *The Theory of Special Operations*, Admiral McRaven of the US Navy has argued that Special Forces operations would always be of strategic nature to accomplish strategic objectives.²⁷ The strategic role of Special Forces has also been acknowledged by Sun Tzu in his famous treatise, *The Art of War*. Sun Tzu says, 'Generally, in battle, use the normal force to engage; use the extraordinary to win.'²⁸ However, the role of our Special Forces has largely been confined to tactical and operational domains, instead of focusing on strategic tasks.

We are, however, seeing a gradual change in the approach of the armed forces. Now, the service doctrines talk of the strategic use of Special Forces. It is important to mention here that the *Joint Doctrine for Special Forces Operations*, authored by Headquarters (HQ) of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), Doctrine Branch, also recognizes the strategic role of Special Forces, which is 'ideally suited for varied role across the entire

spectrum of conflict, that is from strategic and operational level tasks to unconventional warfare and counter insurgency/counter terrorism tasks.²⁹

However, issues like lack of political will, credible intelligence machinery, turf battles within and among the armed forces and, most importantly, lack of a centralized command structure have made transborder employment of Indian Special Forces in strategic roles a difficult proposition.

Lack of Centralized Command Structure

Special Forces operations are generally joint operations involving various security and other government agencies. This requires great amount of coordination. Moreover, since time is at a premium when it comes to special operations, decisions have to be made fast. This brings us to the need for an effective and secure command, control, communication, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) support for Special Forces operations. The merits of a centralized command structure for special operations are well acknowledged: not only will it enable us to ensure optimum utilization of resources, it will also ensure quicker response and coordination of operations, thereby avoiding duplication of efforts. Moreover, a unified command will also help standardize manpower management, weapons and equipment induction, training processes and infrastructure development. The unified command will ensure jointness in Special Forces operations, which is the sine qua non for success of strategic missions. Bringing Special Forces under one umbrella with the objective of carrying out highly coordinated swift and pre-emptive wartime strikes or anti-terrorism operations is the need of the hour.

The similarity of tasks performed by Special Forces of the three wings of the Indian armed forces is striking and include, counterterrorism, intelligence gathering, hostage rescue and clandestine operations. Nevertheless, they also have some traits unique to their respective service requirements. For example, the marine commandoes of the Indian Navy specialize in maritime missions and DEAA is the core competence of IAF Garuds. Specialized competencies or professional mastery of land, sea and air are fundamental to effective joint operations. This seems to be one of the important rationales behind each service having its own Special Forces. However, it is more in recognition of the former, that is, similarity of tasks they perform, that the IDS HQ published the Indian *Joint*

Doctrine for Special Forces Operations in October 2008 as a prelude to the setting up of a unified command. The 2008 doctrine is a reflection on the jointness of thinking in the Indian armed forces. The Indian Army, IAF and Indian Navy doctrines also advocate for jointness. The *Indian Army Doctrine* (2004), while emphasizing on meticulous planning in order to ensure success of Special Forces operations, says, 'plans must be evolved jointly in conjunction with the Air Force and Navy where employment of their resources is involved.'³⁰ The *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (2004) says, 'it is essential that naval special forces train frequently with those of the other services to ensure interoperability and synergy in joint operations.'³¹ Similarly, the IAF Doctrine (2012) identifies joint planning from inception stage as one of the salient aspects that need to be considered for the employment of the Special Forces.

However, despite this realization about the importance of joint operations and creation of a unified command being the best way to ensure jointness, India is perhaps the only country whose Special Forces have no centralized command structure. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the government to implement the Naresh Chandra Committee recommendation for a Special Operations Command (SOC) to prevent repetition of the lackadaisical response to the hijacking of the Indian Airlines aircraft to Kandahar in 1999 and the delayed and muddled response by the NSG during the 26/11 attack on Mumbai.³² The 14-member Naresh Chandra task force on national security identified the need for an SOC, to bring together the existing Special Forces of the army, navy, air force and other relevant agencies under a unified command and control structure to execute strategic or politico-military operations in tune with India's national security objectives.³³ The government is yet to act on the recommendations of the Committee which submitted its report in May 2012. India's Special Forces normally operate under the Army Command. This is an ad hoc arrangement and a change is desirable.

The specifics of the Naresh Chandra Committee recommendation regarding SOC are not in the public domain. However, considering that the three services will have to cede control over personnel and materiel under this arrangement, the task of creating a consensus will not be easy.³⁴ A beginning has been made in this regard with the Chiefs of Staff Committee's proposal for three additional tri-service commands—Cyber, Special Forces and Space. Moreover, the Directorate of Amphibious & Special Forces (AMPH & SF) of the IDS coordinates with services HQ

and formulates training policy and coordinates training on the Special Forces doctrine.

There are also other models of Special Forces command suggested by veteran Special Forces officers and experts like Prakash Katoch, apart from the Naresh Chandra Committee, proposed SOC. In his book, *India's Special Forces: History and Future of Indian Special Forces*, Katoch gives an outline of the command structure.³⁵ Significantly, in this proposed model, he talks about a Special Forces Cell as an adjunct to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to act as the 'brain' to evolve a national doctrine and strategy for employment of Special Forces and look into other important related matters.

Another important recommendation made by Katoch in this regard is a three-tier set-up for Special Forces. He says:

India needs a three-tier set-up of Special Operations Forces. Tier one should be the Special Forces that are purely deployed strategically on politico-military missions on foreign soil. Tier two should be the Commando Forces that meet military requirements in conventional war as also counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations within the country. Tier three should be the airborne forces as rapid-reaction forces.³⁶

Katoch's prescription is very comprehensive and strikes at the root of the problem. It addresses many key questions concerning Special Forces, like strategic use of Special Forces, political direction and internal security tasks.

Internal Security Duties

The expediency of employment of armed forces for internal security duties has been under scrutiny of security analysts.³⁷ While deployment of the armed forces on a prolonged basis would not be a feasible idea, the judicious use of Special Forces to make strategic gains would not be a bad idea as such, more so when the distinction between the internal and external security threat tends to get blurred with the terrorists and other non-state actors being so well networked and MHA not geared to face such a potent enemy.³⁸ An attack of the magnitude of 26/11, the 1999 Kandahar hijack episode, the 2001 Parliament attack, liberated zones of the Maoists, writ of the insurgent groups running in the North-East, all show the reach of India's adversaries. The use of Special Forces to tackle the threat of this magnitude which strikes at the very root of our

system and poses an existential threat makes sense, and their mandate also envisage such role for them. Moreover, the state police forces and normal CAPFs are not geared to tackle threats of this nature. Gurmeet Kanwal, echoes the same view: '[T]he greater reliance on invisible and quiet Special Forces (SF) operations, marked by surgical strikes based on precise and trustworthy intelligence gathered by the SF personnel themselves, will yield greater dividends.'³⁹

As mentioned earlier, NSG was raised as a Federal Contingency Force under MHA to tackle all facets of terrorism in the country, with a view to protecting states against internal disturbances and for matters connected therewith. The raising of NSG was an acknowledgment of this fact that some of the internal security challenges that we face have serious external dimensions too,⁴⁰ and our police force alone are not capable to tackle this challenge. The army *Doctrine for Sub Conventional Operations* also conceives broad-ranging roles for the Indian Army in internal security crises.

The distinction between internal and external challenges is often blurred as nations increasingly resort to proxy wars, and non-state actors transcend national boundaries. India has been a victim of proxy wars unleashed by neighbours and has been under the constant threat of asymmetric forces; here, Special Forces can play the deterrent role to perfection. However, it may not be a good idea to employ them on a regular basis. Specific high-value targets or tasks could be given to them. The final decision to deploy Special Forces in an internal security role will be political, and here the question of political will or acumen comes into focus.

Political Will

Special Forces operations demand political will at the national level. Since the stakes are very high in employing them, particularly on duties away from home, these forces have hardly been used strategically for politico-military missions across the border. These missions are kept under wraps owing to their sensitive nature and high value. Any fallout of the decision has to be borne solely by the political executive, thus deterring him/her from making such decisions. However, it is advisable to have a sound policy of Special Forces deployment abroad to enable the political executive to make a decision which flows out of such a document based on credible intelligence assessment.

Intelligence Apparatus Synchronization

Since there is very little margin of error in such operations, detailed information about the operational area is a sine qua non for the success of operations. The Indian experience on this front has been far from encouraging till now. External intelligence, vital for any military operation, and more so for special operations, has been India's Achilles heel since independence. Earlier, the IB was entrusted with this responsibility, but post-1962 war, R&AW was given the task of external intelligence. However, coordination of external intelligence with military requirements became problematic and the situation has remained unchanged.⁴¹

All three services have got their individual intelligence departments and after the Kargil fiasco in 1999, which was a result of poor coordination among various agencies, a Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) was created. With the establishment of the DIA, service intelligence agencies have been integrated and a common assessment of strategic intelligence inputs is now available to defence planners.

The success of any mission is directly proportional to the quality of actionable intelligence input, both in technical and manpower terms, provided by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), National Technical Research Organization (NTRO), R&AW, National Investigation Agency (NIA), IB, and DIA. The JIC provides a forum for all intelligence agencies to come together and share intelligence, and also feed the relevant agencies with actionable and credible intelligence. The fallout of wrong or sketchy intelligence inputs for Special Forces could be disastrous, as the experience of Operation Pawan suggests. The unsubstantiated information about the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres in Jaffna took a heavy toll on Indian troops.

A lot of good work is being done in this arena, but if intelligence value is to be measured in terms of deliverable outcomes, India's intelligence capacities are still deficient in two critical aspects, purposeful integration and accountability, apart from the state-of-the-art communication devices.

Equipment for Special Forces

Procurement of weapons, equipment and technology for the Special Forces should get utmost priority, given the nature of high-risk, high-value tasks they perform. In recent years, the government has focused on this aspect and specialized equipment for the Special Forces are being acquired. American M-4 assault rifles, used by the US Navy SEALs in

the operation to eliminate Osama bin Laden, have been inducted into the Indian Army's Special Forces battalions for use in counterterrorist operations. India had signed a deal with the US worth several crore for procuring these M-4 carbine rifles for the Army's Special Forces battalions. The Rs 70 lakh contract for 33 'underwater open-circuit diving equipment' from Sweden has been inked. Then, there is the 'controlled aerial delivery system' to drop specialized payloads in designated target areas behind enemy lines. The equipment being inducted ranges from 5.56 mm TAR-21 Tavor assault rifles, 7.62 mm Galil sniper rifles, M4A1 carbines, all-terrain multi-utility vehicles and global positioning system (GPS) navigation systems to modular acquisition devices, laser rangefinders, high-frequency communication sets, and combat free-fall parachutes.⁴² The IAF's newly acquired C-130J Super Hercules aircraft is considered to be one of the most modern aircrafts configured for special operations and airborne assault. The C-130J Super Hercules is a highly integrated and sophisticated configuration primarily designed to support India's special operations requirement. Equipped with an infrared detection set, the aircraft can perform precision low-level flying, airdrops and landing in blackout conditions.

The Indian Navy has initiated the procurement of the advanced integrated combat system, including equipment such as light-weight helmets, vests and weapons, to strengthen the capabilities of its commandos. The gear has been designed to allow a commando to perform his task without hindrance and offers special assistance in highly challenging operations. The gear of the marine commandos brings them at par with international standards. As part of the makeover, MARCOS have also absorbed new weapons, including the Tavor-21 assault rifle and Galil sniper rifle procured from Israel.⁴³

The Indian Army's Future Infantry Soldier as a System (F-INSAS) programme, aimed at harnessing technologies to enable the army to deploy a fully networked, all-terrain and all-weather infantry with enhanced firepower and mobility for the future digitized battlefield, focuses on the need to provide the infantry soldier with greater lethality, movement, survivability, sustainability, communications and situational awareness. The programme is primarily an aggregate of 'System of Sub-systems' to transform the Indian infantryman into a self-contained fighting machine, enabling him to operate across the entire spectrum of future battles, including nuclear war and low-intensity conflict in a network-centric environment.⁴⁴

Special infrastructure scheme (SIS) of MHA has been expanded to provide funds for upgradation of infrastructure, weaponry, equipment and training of Special Forces of LWE-affected states.

The thrust on equipping the Special Forces with state-of-the-art weapons and gadgets will bring about a qualitative change in their functioning. It will give our Special Forces an edge over the adversary and increase their combat ability manifold. Yet, limited night fighting capabilities still remain a critical gap area. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that Special Forces are also about the quality of the human beings and not just about machines and gadgets.

Human Resource (HR) Issues

One of the universally acknowledged Special Forces truths is: humans are more important than hardware. The nature of the job demands that they should be limited in number, extremely well trained, equipped and manned by high-quality manpower. Therefore, they cannot be mass produced. Prakash Katoch gives a fair account of the challenges faced on this front; lack of quality manpower and officers, grossly inadequate language proficiency and inadequate advanced training facilities are some of the most glaring shortcomings of India's Special Forces.⁴⁵ The officer promotion policy is not favourable to the Special Forces. A three-star rank officer is a rare commodity in the Indian armed forces.

Today, there is a growing realization across the world that the training regimen for police and security forces must now include psychological stress management modules in addition to the mandatory physical, professional and combat trainings. India's Special Forces constitute both military and CAPF personnel. There are genuine concerns pertaining primarily to living conditions and allowances of CAPF deployed in hostile conditions. The demanding nature of their job takes a heavy toll on their health, particularly mental health. Stress is a very common and disturbing feature among CAPF personnel. To compound the problem, the issue of discrimination between CAPF and the military personnel has led to discontentment among the former and dented their morale. K. Vijay Kumar, security advisor in the MHA and a former Director General of the CRPF, in a recent interview said:

I don't want to draw comparisons. However, as I already mentioned, the casualties suffered by the CAPFs are much higher than in any other force. Giving certain perks and benefits might not be a motivating factor, but denying those allowances, refusing benefits

and discrimination is definitely demotivating. This has been proved by innumerable studies. Discrimination has made a huge dent in the morale of the forces.⁴⁶

Steps have been taken to address the stress-related problems in CAPF. Former Director General CRPF, Pranay Sahay, says, 'training curriculum of the CAPFs personnel has been revised and various subjects like yoga, Tai-Chi and stress management, etc., [*sic*] have been incorporated. Besides, personnel have been put through the various training programmes like "stress management" and "art of living", etc.'⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

At a time when the battlefield has been progressively transforming from conventional to unconventional, the role of Special Forces is becoming critical in shaping its outcome. Conflicts in the past decade have established the primacy of Special Forces. Their role has evolved and, today, special operations are meant to be decisive and achieve strategic objectives. The Indian security establishment has also been taking notice of these changes and, by and large, making the right moves. However, it must be stressed here that our Special Forces require urgent attention of the government to fill some critical gaps in their functioning. The forces, on their part, will have to learn the best practices in the field from their counterparts operating elsewhere and apply those lessons innovatively and imaginatively in their own operational domain.

Recently, speaking of conflicts in the twenty-first century, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that India has a great responsibility to help the world counter new threats to global peace.⁴⁸ Special Forces will thus be crucial in countering these new threats, which are mostly in the unconventional domain of warfare.

NOTES

1. See 'Doctrine for Sub Conventional Operations', No. 1, December 2006, p. 1, available at <http://ids.nic.in/doctrine.htm>, accessed on 3 February 2015.
2. The effectiveness of Special Forces has been aptly brought out by Whitney Grespin who quotes one US armed forces veteran who commented, '[Special Operations Forces or SOF are] less than 5 percent of the people, and less than 5 percent of the budget, but they did 60–70 percent of the work in Afghanistan'. Grespin goes on to say that 'while some may disagree with this assessment, it is undeniable that SOF's specialized skill sets have proven to be appropriate tools in the asymmetric and counterinsurgent warfare styles

- of Iraq and Afghanistan'. See Whitney Grespin, 'The Quiet Professionals: The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces', *Diplomatic Courier*, 20 September 2013, available at <http://www.diplomaticcourier.com/news/topics/security/1803-the-quiet-professionals-the-future-of-u-s-special-forces>, accessed on 6 September 2014.
3. For a detailed account of the meaning of security provider and political will and military capacity to provide security, see Rumel Dahiya, 'Political Will and Military Capacity to Provide Security', in S.D. Muni and Vivek Chadha (eds), *Asian Strategic Review 2015: India as a Security Provider*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2015, pp. 9–27.
 4. Addressing the top brass of the Indian Navy and Ministry of Defence (MoD), former Defence Minister, A.K. Antony, had said that the Indian Navy has been 'mandated to be a net security provider to island nations in the Indian Ocean Region'. See 'Indian Navy—Net Security Provider to Island Nations in IOR: Antony', Press Information Bureau (PIB), 12 October 2011, available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=76590>, accessed on 1 September 2014. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh echoed the same theme at the foundation stone laying ceremony for the Indian National Defence University, when he said, 'We are well positioned, therefore, to become a net provider of security in our immediate region and beyond.' See 'PM's Speech at the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony for the Indian National Defence University at Gurgaon', PIB, 23 May 2013, available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=96146>, accessed on 1 September 2014.
 5. Here, it is worthwhile to mention that as per the Fragile State Index, 2014, 18 of the 66 states most at risk are located in Asia. Significantly, almost every country that shares India's borders is among the countries most at risk. Afghanistan ranks 7th; Pakistan, 10th; Myanmar, 24th; Bangladesh, 29th; Sri Lanka, 30th; Nepal, 31st; and Bhutan, 64th. South Asia is also the new epicentre of global terror—with 'AfPak' at its core. See 'Fragile States Index 2014', available at <http://ffp.statesindex.org/>, accessed 4 February 2015. As Ajai Sahni puts it: this is the quintessential 'bad neighborhood', arguably 'the most dangerous place on earth'. Also see Ajai Sahni, 'India's Internal Security Challenges', in *India's Security Challenges at Home and Abroad*, May 2012, Special Report #39, Washington DC: The National Bureau of Asian Research, p. 5. The phrase was first applied to South Asia by US President Bill Clinton prior to his visit to India and Pakistan in March 2000.
 6. Katoch, P.C., *India's Special Forces: History and Future of Indian Special Forces*, New Delhi: Vij Books, 2013, p. 119.
 7. See *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, Washington DC: Department of Defense, 2014, p. 227, available at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/, accessed on 1 September 2014.

8. Ibid., p. 228.
9. See *Indian Army Doctrine, Part-II: Conduct of Operations*, Shimla: Headquarters Army Training Command, October 2004, p. 12, available at <http://ids.nic.in/doctrine.htm>, accessed on 1 February 2015.
10. See *Indian Maritime Doctrine 2004*, New Delhi: Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), 25 April 2004, p. 107.
11. Ibid., p. 108.
12. See *Basic Doctrine of the Indian Air Force 2012*, New Delhi: Air Headquarters, Indian Air Force, 2012, p. 101.
13. See 'Special Operations Forces: Operating Concept', United States Special Operations Command, May 2013, available at http://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=9&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CD8QFjAI&url=http%3A%2F%2Ffortunascorner.files.wordpress.com%2F2013%2F05%2Ffinal-low-res-sof-operating-concept-may-2013.pdf&ei=CvwBVID1C8Hr8AW1_oCIAw&usq=AFQjCNGRRn6FrRVORwt5cG8U4bK4ihpCOQ&sig2=Ho-u9_F34DKbfH6naxFMdQ&bvm=bv.74115972,d.dGc, accessed on 30 August 2014.
14. Pandit, Rajat, 'Para-Special Forces Get Two New Battalions', *The Times of India*, 17 August 2014, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Para-special-forces-get-two-new-battalions/articleshow/40320129.cms>, accessed on 4 September 2014.
15. See 'Dressed to Fight: Eight Combat Uniforms of India's Men in Action', *India Today*, available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/gallery/men-in-uniform/1/9383.html>, accessed on 4 September 2014; and G.M. Hiranandani, 'Navy's Marine Commandos', *Indian Defence Review*, 24 March 2014, available at <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/navys-marine-commandos/>, accessed on 4 September 2014.
16. Oberoi, Vijay (ed.), *Special Forces: Doctrines, Structures and Employment across the Spectrum of Conflict in the Indian Context*, New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2006.
17. See http://nsg.gov.in/organisation_history.php, accessed on 1 September 2014; and <http://mha.nic.in/pdtwo>, accessed on 4 September 2014.
18. See 'Special Report—National Security Guard (NSG): Making of Black Cats', *Rajya Sabha TV*, 30 June 2014, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nb4BjW1ZA4>, accessed on 2 September 2014.
19. See 'Security Cover: SPG and NSG Protecting the Highly Protected', *The Economic Times*, 7 November 2013, available at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-11-07/news/43776075_1_spg-act-security-cover-spg-cover, accessed on 2 September 2014.
20. See http://crpf.nic.in/crp_b.htm, accessed on 1 September 2014.

21. See <http://itbpolice.nic.in/itbpwebsite/index.html>, accessed on 1 September 2014.
22. See <http://www.spg.nic.in/spgact.htm> and <http://www.spg.nic.in/>, accessed on 2 September 2014.
23. Katoch, *India's Special Forces*, n. 6, p. 94.
24. See 'Maha's Elite Counter Terror Unit Force One becomes Operational', *Business Standard*, 25 November 2009, available at http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/maha-s-elite-counter-terror-unit-force-one-becomes-operational-109112500047_1.html, accessed on 2 September 2014.
25. See <http://www.mahapolice.gov.in/mahapolice/jsp/temp/ats.jsp>, accessed on 2 September 2014.
26. See 'Exclusive Commando Unit takes Charge of Parliament Security', *India Today*, 6 August 2013, available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/exclusive-commando-unit-takes-charge-of-parliament-security/1/298190.html>, accessed on 4 September 2014.
27. McRaven, William H., *The Theory of Special Operations*, Unpublished thesis, California, 1977, available at <http://www.afsoc.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/history/AFD-051228-021.pdf>, accessed on 26 March 2015.
28. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 16.
29. See 'Navy Chief Unveils Joint Doctrine for Special Forces Operations', PIB, 30 September 2008, available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=43242>, accessed on 13 February 2015.
30. See *Indian Army Doctrine, Part-II: Conduct of Operations*, n. 9, p. 13.
31. See *Indian Maritime Doctrine 2004*, n. 10, p. 115.
32. Sinha, Deepak, 'Special Operations Forces: Understanding the Dynamics of Change', *Indian Defence Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2 April 2014, available at <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/special-operations-forces-understanding-the-dynamics-of-change/>, accessed on 7 September 2014.
33. See 'Recommendations of the Naresh Chandra Committee', available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=85754>, accessed on 26 March 2015; and Manoj Joshi, 'Shutting His Ears to Change', *indiatoday.in*, 22 November 2013, available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/national-security-naresh-chandra-gom-manmohan-singh-cabinet-committee-on-security-ministry-of-defence-chandra-committee-iaf-army/1/325970.html>, accessed on 26 March 2015; and Balaji Chandramohan, 'The Indian Special Forces: An Evolving Approach', *Future Directions International*, 28 March 2013, available at <http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publications/indian-ocean/954-the-indian-special-forces-an-evolving-approach.html#sthash.IHRtuoLo.dpuf>, accessed on 26 March 2015.

34. The indecision over the office of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) is also largely a fallout of this, apart from other reasons.
35. Katoch, *India's Special Forces: History and Future of Indian Special Forces*, n. 23.
36. Raghuvanshi, Vivek, 'Support Rises for Unified Indian Spec Ops Command', *Defence News*, 19 May 2014, available at <http://archive.defensenews.com/article/20140519/DEFREG03/305190025/Support-Rises-Unified-Indian-Spec-Ops-Command>, accessed on 13 February 2015.
37. The essence of their argument can be summarized in the words of an army veteran, Brigadier Rumel Dahiya, who opines: 'Whereas employing Armed Forces may appear to be an attractive idea in the face of inability of state and central police forces and PMF to control the menace, the adverse effects of long term commitment of Armed Forces particularly that on the Army, needs to be understood. Their involvement in anti-naxal operations will seriously affect their combat readiness to face external security challenges which we can ill afford. We need to develop other potent alternatives for which adequate scope exists.' See Rumel Dahiya, 'Anti-Naxal Operations: Employment of Armed Forces', *IDSIA Issue Brief*, 4 May 2010, p. 1, available at http://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/Anti-NaxalOperationsEmploymentofArmedForces_rdahiya_040510.html, accessed on 7 September 2014.
38. While delivering the 22nd Intelligence Bureau Centenary Endowment Lecture in 2009, the then Union Home Minister, P. Chidambaram, had proposed radical restructuring of the security architecture at the national level: 'MHA now handles a wide portfolio of subjects ranging from "freedom fighters" to "forensic science". Is this a functional arrangement to deal with the grave challenges to internal security that we face and that we will face from many more years? I am afraid not.' See 'Home Minister Proposes Radical Restructuring of Security Architecture', PIB, 23 December 2009, available at <http://www.pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=56395>, accessed on 7 September 2014.
39. Kanwal, Gurmeet, 'Managing Internal Security: Case for a New National-Level Counter-Insurgency Force', *CLAWS Journal*, Winter 2007, p. 96.
40. According to Kautilya, there can be four dangers to a state: that which is of external origin and internal abetment; that which is of internal origin and external abetment; that which is of external origin and external abetment; and that which is of internal origin and internal abetment. See 'Doctrine for Sub Conventional Operations', n. 1.
41. Menon, Narayan, 'India's Special Operations Capability', *Indian Defence Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3, July–September 2011, available at <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/indias-special-operations-capability/0/>, accessed on 13 February 2015.

42. Pandit, 'Para-Special Forces Get Two New Battalions', n. 14.
43. See 'India's Sea Lions: Navy's Marine Commandos Get a Makeover and Reveal a Leaner and Meaner New Look,' *Daily Mail*, 23 July 2012, available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2177847/Navys-marine-commandos-makeover-reveal-leaner-meaner-new-look.html>, accessed on 13 February 2015.
44. Bedi, Rahul, 'Still Waiting for F-INSAS', *Defence and Security of India*, 1 September 2013, available at <http://defencesecurityindia.com/artillery-still-waiting-for-f-insas/>, accessed on 13 February 2015.
45. See Katoch, *India's Special Forces*, n. 6.
46. See 'Discrimination has Dented Morale', Interview with K. Vijay Kumar, *Outlook*, 15 December 2014, available at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/Discrimination-Has-Dented-Morale/292786>, accessed on 22 February 2015.
47. See 'Exclusive Interview with Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)'s Director General Pranay Sahay IPS', *Defence and Security Alert*, February 2013, available at <http://www.dsalert.org/jointness-centre-state-synergy-in-counter-terrorism-operations/555-exclusive-interview-the-director-general-of-central-reserve-police-force-crpf-mr-pranay-sahay-ips>, accessed on 22 February 2015.
48. Ministry of External Affairs, 'Prime Minister's Message to Heads of Indian Missions', 7 February 2015, available at http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/24765/Prime_Ministers_message_to_Heads_of_Indian_Missions, accessed on 13 February 2015.