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Military Education in India Missing the Forest for the Trees

*Prakash Menon**

India's Professional Military Education (PME) system is weighted towards the tactical level in all stages of professional development. This results in inadequate exposure of its senior leadership to strategic studies, thus inhibiting the provision of qualitative advice at the strategic level. While combat as an instrument of warfare is focused on at all levels, it fails to relate to war as an instrument of politics. It underlines the absence of an effort to build a broader vision that incorporates the entire constellation of forces. As a general rule, technology has been privileged over humanities in PME. Although the establishment of the Indian National Defence University (INDU) will address some of the shortcomings, a concurrent review of syllabi in the premier joint training institutions is essential in order to achieve a balanced, progressive shift from an emphasis on technology at the initial stages to a humanities focus at the senior levels.

India's vast network of military training institutions, which determine the quality of its professional skills through a carefully designed and progressive process encompassing the entire career span, forms the cornerstone of its military prowess. PME has failed to recognise that the autonomy of its military sphere had diminished, and appreciate the need to broad base the system to incorporate the constellation of forces in which military activity occurs. Moreover, because contemporary force application is loaded with heightened political sensitivity which a

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pervasive media easily exacerbates, it is almost incumbent on PME that it develops a multifaceted understanding of the political, social and cultural landscape in which the military functions.

India's PME system has been a laggard in the development of the echelon of higher leadership, principally due to inadequate anticipation and hence failure to build a framework that aligns military force application to political purposes. Firepower is the military's primary preoccupation, which at the tactical level requires a scientific approach. However, PME tends to neglect the importance of transiting to the strategic level, demanding a people-centric approach, thus requiring grounding in the humanities and social sciences. Additionally, there is a natural aversion towards the political sphere, a derivative of the Indian military's apolitical tradition. There is a crucial neglect of strategic studies as a discipline both in universities and in PME, which has resulted in a human capital deficit. It is essential that this must be remedied as it adversely impacts policy and strategy formulation. In an era of greater opportunities, challenges and uncertainty, India can ill afford the tardy pace at which some extant corrective measures are currently ongoing.

Ideally, PME must imbue senior military leadership with a broader perspective so as to equip them with the relevant intellectual tools that can function effectively at the technology–humanities intersection, and therefore be able to envisage, translate and convert the impact of military actions into political effect. The challenge is to manage the transition from training to education; to foster a greater understanding of the linkage between a particular action and its impact on the larger purpose for which it is undertaken.

This article examines the issue at three levels. It begins with a discussion on the nature of the problem and the demands it engenders on the PME system. It then undertakes a review of the existing PME system, and finally, looks at the way ahead.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

In November 2014, a commanding officer (CO) of an infantry unit was court-martialed in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and awarded life imprisonment for staging the killing of three innocent civilians and branding them as terrorists. The motivation for the act was, in all probability, driven by the impulse to promote the chances of his battalion to win the 'unit citation' award by enhancing the number of terrorists

killed—a key parameter that determines the award.¹ This particular incident, which occurred in April 2010, ended up costing over a 100 lives and triggered a series of violent protests in the state till October of that year. While similar cases, though isolated and few in number, have occurred before, this was a tactical event which had strategic repercussions that weakened the overall counter-insurgency effort. The natural corollary based on some previous incidents should have been a review of the ‘unit citation’ by the highest leadership; instead, the top brass ignored any moves to remove this known source of human rights violations by favouring ‘motivation through awards’. This is tunnel vision in action, which fails to see the larger picture and signifies the crux of the problem—missing the forest for the trees. Stated differently, the CO was *trained* but not sufficiently *educated*.

A geopolitically unstable neighbourhood, disputed borders and internal conflicts continue to place a premium on India’s defence preparations. Having experienced four major and one minor war in six decades, being perennially involved in internal conflicts and border tensions, and as the largest contributor to United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Operations, its military is rich in experience and its performance, with one exception, has been rather creditable.² Ultimately, war is a mind game in which intellectual capital in strategic affairs is a requisite in both civil and military realms. Strategic studies provides the theoretical heft to understand war and must be a part of the intellectual arsenal of both leaderships. Political leaders guide utilisation of force, whereas force application is essentially a military specialisation. Successful political guidance and military effectiveness is largely governed by the quality of human capital that the nation generates to support the national security effort.

For more than a decade now, the Indian military has been undergoing a modernisation programme that is likely to witness procurement of equipment worth several billion dollars over two and a half decades. Modernisation is also vital in PME as the effectiveness of the material acquisition will eventually be reliant largely on the proficiency of the military leadership, which is mainly acquired and shaped through a PME system that must evolve with the constantly changing character of war.³ It is imperative that India must pay more attention to developing the software of strategic affairs—its human capital; currently, it is hardware, in terms of equipment acquisition, that is being privileged over software.

PME is the bedrock of military effectiveness that progressively hones and shapes the proficiencies of military professionals to shoulder responsibilities that are commensurate with rank and appointment. The initial focus is on abilities for combat, which progressively and ultimately seeks to equip the senior hierarchy of officers and generals with the competence to enable contribution to policy and strategy evolution and execution. Therefore, in addition to the established expectations for professional knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes, senior-level military leaders must move beyond their specialisation and obtain an understanding of the forces at play in the larger political and strategic landscape. It is conventional wisdom that the structure of PME is based on the notion that the tactical level forms the foundation for initial and mid-career education, whereas the focus for the senior echelon is the strategic level. However, there is increasing realisation that unless the tactical-level focus is nested in a larger context that is aimed at fostering an understanding of its higher purpose, it fails to enrich the quality of the activity and safeguard against tactical actions; and decisions taken with tunnel vision that would, in many cases, have a strategic impact.

Military leaders are bred on a quality that relates to action and have a natural aversion for the 'theoretical', which, in effect, is an anti-intellectual disposition. The preference is for the 'practical' as contemplation is not a natural leaning. The proclivity for 'doing stuff' fills the entire span of an officer's career activities, but it does not provide for a greater understanding of his art. A good edification in strategic thinking and policy formulation that is institutionally promoted and suitably incentivised is required to spark interest at every stage in the PME process, and to widen horizons that ultimately connect actions to purpose.

Military actions involving threat or the use of force are inherently unpredictable in the effects they can generate. A broadened horizon provides some degree of clarity in an otherwise complex environment. Though most military leaders are likely to be involved only in the tactical realm in their careers, the need to understand broader political and strategic landscapes is inescapable for effective functioning in the tactical domain. Yet, exposure beyond the tactical level must be accorded at an appropriate stage of the education spectrum. The instrumentality of war as a political tool must frame the background for developing combat skills that are ultimately aimed at political outcomes. This demands that PME must incorporate a pedagogic structure that maintains the bond between the tactical and strategic levels, and blends the levels appropriately at

various stages. The idea is to broaden perspective and *not* to make scholars out of military leaders.

Education can imbue officers with critical thinking skills, broader perspectives and strengthened abilities so that they can contribute to solutions of complex issues. The existing Indian PME system is oriented narrowly towards the tactical level and provides inadequate insight of the political and strategic levels. There is a neglect of strategic studies that prevents acquisition of a strategic outlook and, therefore, PME needs to equip officers with the intellectual tools to analyse strategic problems. There is insufficient backing from mid-level officers who are trained analysts. This article makes the case for restructuring India's PME along two axes: first, by increasing the understanding of the politico-military perspective of senior leaders in order to ultimately meet the demands for improved policy/strategy formulation and execution; and second, by broadening the strategic perspective of leaders in order to adapt to changes in the character of war.

Policy/Strategy Formulation

In order to promote mutual understanding, an effective policy and strategy formulation process on defence issues requires continuous and iterative politico-military interaction as a means to confront the politico-military problematic, which can be explained as the consequence of inevitable differences between two institutional entities due to their divergent outlook. The politician is, by nature, endowed with a short-term outlook with heightened sensitivity to domestic constituencies. Humanities, more than technology, shapes their outlook. In liberal democracies like India, populism, with an eye on the ballot, is the norm that guides political decisions and actions. Defence and national security issues do not attract the attention they deserve. Not only does a lack of depth in debates in Parliament provide sufficient evidence that issues of immediate political value dominate political discourse, it is further compounded by a deficiency in strategic outlook amongst most of the political class. Understandably, it would be impractical to expect the politician to read Kautaliya's *Arthashastra* or Clausewitz's *On War*, or be well versed with the nuances and potential of the military instrument he is expected to wield. This, more or less, is the natural state of the political leadership and, barring individual exceptions, is unlikely to change.

The military leadership, on the other hand, is expected to acquire a strategic outlook through the PME system that is supplemented by

experience and self-education. It has to have a long-term perspective, which produces a natural tension against the short-term outlook of the politician. The long-term perspective has also to be nested in an essentially political context, which in itself is a product of social, economic, technological, cultural and other factors that relate more to the humanities. The military leadership is inclined to distance itself from the chaotic, exasperating and controversial world of politics and public policy, and thus has difficulty in comprehending the political context and its nuances mainly due to three reasons. First, as a consequence of the apolitical nature of the Indian Armed Forces—a hallmark and institutional strength—there is a natural dislike for matters political that is ingrained in the DNA of Indian military leaders. Second, being focused on technology they have insufficient understanding of matters political, economic, social and humanities as a whole. Third, it is often the case that the political guidance available to military leaders for drawing the contours of a futuristic political context is unavailable, scantily sketched, or too unrealistic to undertake due to the inherent uncertainty of the future.

This prevailing military handicap can be remedied, albeit partially, by an increased exposure to strategic studies for larger number of officers through the PME system. Presently, this system exposes a limited population of officers rather late in their careers. The PME process must expose officers to strategic studies at an early stage and build it up through middle and senior levels of education. The change in the character of war only serves to underline the urgency for its implementation.

Character of War

While the fundamental nature of war, which Clausewitz described as war's objective nature—that of 'organised violence for political purposes'—has remained unchanged, the subjective nature of war, which deals with the methodology of application of force—or what we refer to as combat and warfare—is constantly changing due to politics, technology and social, economic and human ingenuity. Warfare, which is essentially the tactical level of war, is the means of contestation and violence its currency. The historical trajectory of contestation has been driven by the ability of opponents to evade the progress of technology through counter technology, and by changing the panorama of combat through human ingenuity. It is the reason why the stronger and better-armed opponent need not necessarily win wars even after winning most battles. The fact that the United States was the loser in the Vietnam, Iraq and

Afghanistan wars, despite being the stronger opponent, only reinforces the idea that winning wars is not about technological superiority alone. Wars are about people and as control of people requires control of their land, there is no alternative but to fight to win the loyalty of the people or subdue them through coercion. Loyalty can be imposed by force, like the Russians have done in Chechnya and China in Tibet and Xinjiang. But the costs of coercion and control of people against their wishes has proven to be not just expensive but increasingly difficult. For example, technology, through a combination of explosives and ingenuity coupled with information and communication technology (ICT), has given birth to the suicide bomber and the improvised explosive device (IED), and the lethality potential of small groups has increased manifold. Since effective counter-measures have not been feasible, it has therefore given birth to the lethality revolution in strategic affairs.⁴

The lethality revolution in strategic affairs is characterised by the empowerment of small groups to inflict substantial destruction that cannot easily be countered using conventional measures. The destructive effect is magnified in effect as the powerful images are instantaneously transmitted globally through pervasive media. No reasonably foolproof measures have been possible against IEDs that can be concealed and detonated remotely. The suicide bomber and the vehicle-borne IED are the diabolic representation of the lethality revolution. The major implication of this revolution is the blurring of tactical and strategic boundaries in conflict. Tactical actions can resonate strategically in effect through the power of the image. The fear induced in the population by the image of destruction caused by a bomb blast in a crowded street can convey an impression of a government unable to protect its citizens. Killing innocent civilians during operations against terrorists, even if unintended, can have a lasting impact of reinforcing the narrative regarding violation of human rights—a *strategic effect* that works against the *strategic objective* of winning hearts and minds. An understanding of the larger picture is therefore crucial even when operating at the tactical level in wars that are now, more often than not, fought amongst the people.⁵ Politics imposes at all levels of war and militaries have to adapt to shifting politics and malleable military and strategic objectives. Junior military leaders thus cannot be innocent of or disconnected from political forces at play in the operating environment.

There is no longer an autonomous military sphere in war that allows the military free play to establish purely military conditions that can

be leveraged through political negotiations, except when the military interaction is limited in aim, scope and geography. There cannot be an autonomy in military operations in conflicts occurring under the nuclear shadow as force application and military targeting will necessarily be circumscribed by politically imposed constraints. Political and military leaders require a mutual understanding of the space that is determined by political vectors within which free military play is allowed. It may well be the case that the space for free military play will continue to shrink, raising the need for deeper politico-military interaction for both the preparation and conduct of war.

The role of PME is to provide the theoretical understanding to handle the implications of tactical actions on the broader strategy it supports. This requires PME to encompass within its ambit the ability to shape leaders at most levels of leadership to be able to 'think strategically'. The heart of PME problem thus is to strike a correct proportion at the two levels. At the tactical level, this is between the greater need for technical prowess and the requirement of a broader understanding that connects military actions to political purpose. At the strategic level, alongside technology, this pertains to an equal understanding of politics, economics, social and psychological domains, thus displacing the dominance that technology had earlier held. The moot question in the Indian context therefore is: does the Indian PME system meet these requirements?

INDIA'S PME SYSTEM

No PME system can retain its effectiveness if it does not incorporate changes in the larger strategic environment. It must foster innovation, intellectual agility and the capability to integrate across multiple domains. A military leader acquires his professional skills through a PME system in vogue. However, unless the leader supplements his knowledge through experience and self-study, the theoretical framework provided by PME will remain but a skeleton and will be unusable in the real world.⁶ Military leaders have no choice but to study the past to fine-tune their skills. It is also the case that independent of the PME system, some military leaders will through self-study make up for the inadequacies; it does not, however, make a case for not addressing the deficiencies in contemporary PME.

The extant PME system in India privileges the tactical level and neglects sufficient exposure to the strategic level. The exposure to the strategic level takes place with a focused approach at the level of the

Table 1 India: Military Education Profile

<i>Type</i>	<i>Service Profile (Years)</i>	<i>Duration</i>	<i>Joint</i>	<i>Aim</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Pre-commission	–	2–4 years	@ Yes	Moulding cadets into officers	@ 60% joint training
Basic	0-1	6 months	No	Orientation to service profile	Service arm/specific
Junior Command	5-6	3 months	No	Command of sub-units	
Staff	9-10	1 year	Yes	Staff duties	
Senior Command	14-15	3 months	No	Battalion command	Only in Army
Higher Command	20	1 year	Yes	Command up to division or equivalent level	Conduct by each service
Higher Defence Management Course	20	1 year	Yes	Defence management at directional level	
National Defence College	28–32	1 year	@ Yes	Strategic studies and national security	@ Include civil service and foreigners

Source: Author.

Notes:

1. The PME profile given in the table spans the entire gamut of mainstream training courses, except those that impart specialised skill sets that are required to facilitate specialised functions, like intelligence, fire support and logistics.
2. All officers approved for the three-star ranks participate in a two-week ‘Core Programme’ that provides exposure to current strategic issues.

Brigadier or equivalent. This is done through the year-long course at the National Defence College (NDC), but is restricted to a very small number of officers who are expected to tenant the generalship of the armed forces; it, however, does not cater for all future generals. It could be described as the culminating point of PME. At all other levels, the focus is on the tactical level and increasing the effectiveness of combat power for military purposes. The existing system fails to trigger the spirit of enquiry to explore the strategic level during all the stages. There is a deficit in the pedagogy regarding the relation of warfare to political objectives. This would be evident from the Indian PME profile given in Table 1.

Pre-commission and Basic Training

The pre-commissioning and basic training lays the foundation for military life and varies from 1–4 years. The National Defence Academy (NDA) provides the single-largest avenue for joining the armed services with intake after the school level.⁷ It is one of the largest joint training institutions of its kind in the world and presently has an intake of 350 cadets per term. Another year's training at the respective service academies follows the three-year training at NDA. The training is focused on building physical attributes, leadership qualities, and providing an initial foundation for one's specific service. Cadets are classified into three streams for award of a degree: Bachelor of Arts (BA) (History, Economics, Political Science and Geography [any three]), Bachelor of Science (BSc) (Maths, Physics and Chemistry), and BSc (Maths, Physics and Computer Science). Since a graduate degree is awarded, academics get a fairly large timeshare. But the contents of academics are insufficiently fashioned to provide at least an initial exposure to political science, international relations theories or strategic studies, especially to the BSc cadets who comprise 80 per cent of the trainees. Social science content for the BSc stream is negligible, and therefore the cadet is deprived of the basic tools to interpret the forces that are at play in the environment. His perspective is technologically biased and lacks an understanding of the human element that comes from the study of history, geography, culture and politics. This is, however, only part of the problem.

There is another matter that the Indian Navy has been pursuing—an engineering degree during basic training. The navy has a parallel intake avenue through its four-year course at the Naval Academy, Ezhimala, that awards an engineering degree. The prime contention is based on the notion that being a highly technologically-oriented service, the navy would benefit from combining what was earlier seen as separate functions—command and technical. The quest for change stems from viewing war as largely a science and betrays a deeper belief that technology is the prime determinant for success in warfare.⁸ Therefore, the premise is that all naval leaders must have an engineering background as it makes them better problem solvers. This belief is contestable.⁹ While technology certainly plays a significant role even though the opponent can counter its advantages, it fails to consider that warfare must ultimately serve the purposes of war. Privileging the technical over the command function seeds the neglect of the larger picture by various levels of leadership,

who are expected to apprehend multiple vectors at play. It is not that an engineer cannot be educated to see the larger picture; rather, it is to state that the focus has tended to *privilege fire power over people*. The pursuit of technological edge blinds people to the significance of integrating the political and human factors in war. The ideal would be to have a balanced blend of leaders from engineering, basic science and social science backgrounds, and thereafter a progressive amalgam between technology and humanities in the PME system. The naval idea has been resisted so far. But if the navy does succeed, it could signify a retrograde step in the PME system.¹⁰

Basic and pre-commission training is also imparted for graduate and school-level entry at service-specific academies like the army's Officer Training Academy (OTA—1 year), Air Force Academy (1.5 years) and the Naval Academy (4 years). The need in all these institutions is to maximise, to the extent feasible, the pedagogy on political science with focus on international relations and strategic studies. At the national level, there is need to arrest the prevailing trend, both at the school and university level, of sacrificing social sciences for science—a trend that has been dominant for several decades in India.

Junior Command and Staff College

Post-commissioning, officers spend about five to six years in units and in order to hone their branch-specific skill sets, they are sent on training courses that includes a Junior Command Course which focuses on command of an infantry company or its equivalent. A grounding in issues of administration, such as law, lands, finance and information systems, is lacking. This should be done through online courses that are available to all levels of the leadership.

The next major level in the PME ladder is the year-long Staff College course where entry is based on a competitive exam and is the first major platform for joint training.¹¹ Only about 15–20 per cent officers are able to attend this course, and it is from amongst these officers that the senior leadership of the military would emerge. It is a course that has a tactical focus wherein national and international security issues get marginal attention through the mechanism of guest lectures by eminent speakers. Students also write a dissertation that provides some of them an exposure to the strategic level. However, there is no effective pedagogic architecture that exposes all the students to the connection between the tactical and strategic levels. Although operational art is part of the

curriculum, it is disconnected from the political and strategic contexts. There is a case for increasing the weightage on strategic studies during this course by decreasing its service-specific tactical-level content.¹² It would require induction of civilian instructors to end the monopoly of a rotating group of serving armed forces officers whose service-specific expertise limits them from imparting knowledge on strategic studies. At the same time, this will strengthen the link with academia and facilitate a cross-pollination of ideas.

As this course covers only 15–20 per cent of the officers, the obvious question that arises is: what about the rest? For, if tactical-level actions in the contemporary conflict arena demand a larger understanding of political vectors, surely the wider pedagogic scope in the PME system cannot be restricted to the select few who have passed the competitive exam for the Staff College. Only an online system of education that is incentivised to help promotion and selection for important appointments can possibly close the gap. Though the likely establishment of INDU in the next few years could be a pedagogic avenue, it will not still satisfy the requirement of quantitative coverage. There is no other practical solution other than an online system of imparting strategic studies based on a capsule system. INDU should privilege this in its development, as it requires minimum infrastructure and ensures maximum coverage. In the long run, INDU will fill the higher education gap in India's national security architecture. Even though, ultimately, the existing PME structure will be subsumed by it, the reforms should not await the advent of the university. (The envisaged INDU structure is given in the Appendix.)

Higher Command and Higher Defence Management

The Higher Command and Higher Defence Management courses are nearly one year courses, conducted at service-specific and joint institutions, for officers who have completed their battalion or equivalent command assignments.¹³ These Colonels or their equivalents in the other services, with about 17–20 years of service, are a narrow band of specially selected officers who potentially will tenant the higher rungs of leadership.¹⁴ They will also form the backbone of support for the senior leadership to evolve operational and strategic-level products in terms of doctrines, policies, strategies and plans—this requires independent and targeted research. The major focus of the course is on the operational

level, which is being defined as the intermediate level that connects the tactical and the strategic levels.¹⁵

The operational level came into prominence during the Cold War and was born of the need to maintain the relevance of the military force in the era of nuclear weapons. Through the creation of the operational level as an arena of autonomous military decision sphere, armed forces in theory defended their relevance of force application for political purposes. But more often than not, this resulted in operational plans and doctrines that were constructed in a political vacuum. If the nuclear shadow demanded war avoidance as a political outcome, the operational sphere attempted to keep alive the notion of victory despite the risk of mutual annihilation. The Cold Start Doctrine¹⁶ that was enunciated by the Indian Army is indicative of the proclivity to produce operational doctrines that are not nested in a realistic political context. It is also proof of the embrace of the operational level in a strategic and political void of the PME system.

The Higher Command-level courses have restructured, but insufficiently, and need to pay more attention to strategic-level vectors that cast their shadow over contemporary and future battlefields. The major drawback is that the pedagogy is not backed by an interpretation founded on an understanding of the theoretical framework of war.¹⁷ A broadening of perspectives that open windows to the complexities of geopolitics; diverse societies; economic, cultural and historic peculiarities; constantly evolving technology; and the pervasive influence of the information revolution must inform pedagogy at this level. Civilian faculty would thus be essential. The major shift of weightage must transpire at this level, from technology to the humanities. For not only are the learners here the future higher leadership, but they are the intellectual support system that prepares the groundwork for the highest levels.

Except for the Higher Defence Management Course, the other Higher Command courses pay scant attention to administrative issues other than operational logistics. So, officers find themselves learning on the job when they are appointed as station commanders and have to deal with issues of law, lands and infrastructure building, inter alia. Since there is no scope for dovetailing administrative topics in the existing courses, these issues too can be done as online courses and made compulsory to complete in a laid-down time frame.

It is possible to put only very few selected officers through these type of courses as it is also from this level that the pyramid gets steeper. But the numbers can be augmented through INDU and an online e-learning

system that is incentivised through an award of degrees and diplomas, while providing a linkage for promotion opportunities and coveted appointments.

Senior Level

The highest level of pedagogy in the PME system is imparted at NDC, New Delhi, through a year-long 'National Security and Strategic Studies Course' for Brigadiers and equivalent thereof in other armed services, civil services, and armed forces officers from foreign countries. It has a capacity for 100 course members, with 20 per cent each for civil and foreign armed forces and remainder for the Indian Armed Forces. The Indian Armed Forces officers would have about 28–32 years of experience and a shelf life of about six to eight years. It is at such a late stage that armed forces officers have dedicated exposure to the highest level that relates national security issues and policy and strategy formulation. These officers undoubtedly augment the capacity of the higher levels for strategic thinking but the organisation can utilise this capacity for a short period only. The number, when seen in the context of the size of the entire armed forces, is thus miniscule and requires to be expanded. Although the course content covers a broad canvas and includes research, a major drawback is in the faculty, as it depends on serving officers from the armed forces and civil services, based on a rotating system of two to three years. Once again, there is a case for augmenting the faculty by civilians specialising in strategic studies.

The Human Capital Deficit

In addition to the PME profile described so far, there is also a two-year study leave system that officers can avail, which could ideally be utilised not only to increase the quantum of officers who would benefit from this opportunity of, but also undertake courses in international relations and strategic studies.¹⁸ But this has not been possible due to the weakness of defence and strategic studies as a discipline in the Indian university system per se. The result is a human capital deficit in the domain of strategic studies and the consequent inability to generate the intellectual capital that is required to support and shape national security policy and strategy formulation.

It is this very deficit that has been acknowledged in the report of the 2011 Committee of Experts, headed by Air Commodore Jasjit Singh,¹⁹ and sponsored by the Ministry of Human Resource Development to assess

the contribution of existing defence and strategic studies departments in universities towards national security. The Committee came to the conclusion that 'national security studies and education in this field as a discipline is nearly absent in the curriculum of our universities and colleges.'²⁰ The report made wide-ranging recommendations and called for a major revamp of the existing educational infrastructure in the discipline of national security studies. Sadly, despite the report's acceptance in 2011, the implementation continues to be sluggish.

Human capital in national security must be viewed as an ecosystem consisting of academia—education from school to graduate, postgraduate, doctoral and postdoctoral research and studies; think tanks and civil society groups; and organs of government dealing with national security,²¹ of which PME is a segment. Once the university system is revamped, as recommended by the Jasjit Singh Committee report, uniformed persons, through study leave, correspondence courses and sponsorship could access it. Similarly, once INDU is established, armed services personnel and civilians could undergo various programmes.

In 1998, a three-member task force on national security had submitted a report to the Prime Minister and recommended the establishment of five autonomous government-funded think tanks in functional areas to support the national security management institutions with requisite research study and analyses inputs based on open sources. This recommendation too has not been implemented.²² Establishing think tanks will also provide opportunity for academically qualified persons to hone their skills and find employment, as lack of employment opportunities make strategic studies unattractive. Strategic studies must also be included as a subject in the civil services entrance exam.

Ideally, a flow of people needs to be established between the various parts of the ecosystem, which will enrich the process through cross-pollination. Eventually, the departments of government that deal with national security issues will be enriched in their competence to formulate policy and strategy, because they can source the human capital from a wider, qualified base.

Humanities and the social sciences have been neglected both in the school and university system in India, while science and mathematics have traditionally been viewed as vehicles for professional achievement and monetary gain. Narrow focus on professional fields has driven the neglect. Most parents view humanities and social science as being meant for weak students. At the graduate and higher levels, humanities and

social sciences fail to attract students of satisfactory merit, thus leading to a dearth of good faculty and trained researchers.²³ The neglect of humanities and social sciences in the civil education system mirrors a similar neglect in PME, where technology is privileged over people, thus demanding immediate remedial measures.

It is an undisputed fact that there is a need to revamp the ecosystem of national security studies in India. Advice pertaining to force application must be supported by the highest quality of human capital that can research and analyse the increasingly complex Indian security milieu, which is a natural consequence of India's growth and development. The military's neglect of strategic studies impacts the policy and strategy formulation process at the national level. It is negligence with potentially unacceptable costs.

THE WAY AHEAD

The rationale of the thrust to strengthen PME should relate to closing the gap in the system by deepening the understanding between the tactical and strategic levels. *Combat as an instrument of warfare must relate to war as an instrument of politics.* The development of such an understanding needs a host of measures that are both exogenous and endogenous to the PME system. Implementing the exogenous measures will be more difficult and take longer, whereas application of endogenous measures could provide some short-term relief. But the process of improvement must embrace an ecosystem approach that encompasses the academic system, INDU, PME, think tanks, civil society groups, and government entities that deal with national security.

A major step is to align the curriculum of pre-commission and all middle to senior-most-level courses to include pedagogy that caters to a broader understanding of international relations, national security issues and defence and strategic studies. A culture of the study of history, especially military history, must be assiduously built into all levels of the leadership development. This will require a comprehensive and holistic review of the entire range of training courses at all levels, and also incorporation into the planned activities of military life.

The challenge of introducing additional subjects into an already overloaded course content will be a daunting one. Therefore, the exercise will need a comprehensive examination, which the Joint Training Committee²⁴ should undertake. A balance must be struck between the

demands of science and social sciences with initial weightage on science shifting to the social sciences at higher levels. The finalised curricula should ensure courses are rigorous, professionally relevant, current, and the levels are dovetailed. What is needed is the realisation by the military leadership of the requirement of incorporating the broadening of perspective, which will allow the mental connect between the battlefield and the realm of political outcomes by underscoring the instrumentality of combat. While the process of developing and sustaining the appropriate perspective must be the focus, it cannot be at the cost of the primary professional requirement of combat skills. *Conceptually, the demand for a technology focus at the tactical level must progressively mutate to a humanities focus at the strategic level.*

The provision of study leave must be utilised to place officers in think tanks and universities in India and abroad, and supplement the faculty-building programme for INDU. Faculty building for strategic studies should be prioritised as well. This requires a national securities studies faculty-building programme to be undertaken under the aegis of the University Grants Commission (UGC),²⁵ which could explore the feasibility of sourcing non-resident Indian talent from foreign universities. The faculty-building programme must also cater for the civilian and armed forces faculty who are required for INDU and identified military institutions, such as NDC, DSSC and Higher Command courses.

INDU should be established forthwith by enacting the INDU Act. Once established with faculty in place, INDU would act as a major feeder to the intellectual capital of the national security professional architecture of India. It will, in due course, facilitate populating the concerned ministries and other institutions like the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) that are involved in policy and strategy formulation, and alleviate the existing human capital problem.

Strengthening the strategic outlook of the political leadership must also be addressed if the quality of policy and strategy formulation is to achieve its potential. The Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha), under its training wing, should undertake the responsibility and provide a platform by conducting 'Strategic Outlook' training capsules for parliamentarians,²⁶ which the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA)²⁷ can undertake.

There is also scope of India–Singapore cooperation by marrying the existing strategic studies infrastructure of Singapore universities with the experience of India's military officers and civilians. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the governments could be sought and

Singapore could also be incorporated in the faculty-building programme. It would work out cheaper in financial terms and, more importantly, it will enable a better understanding of the dynamics of the Asian political theatre—an arena of India's focus.

CONCLUSION

By and large, the military instrument is viewed by the military and the political leadership as being exclusive of politics, and therefore they tend to remain distant and isolated from each other. This is based on a gross misunderstanding of the role of the military, which is, in essence, an instrument meant purely for political purposes.

The idea of an apolitical Indian military should not in any way imply that the military and the political leadership remain distanced through a filter of a civilian bureaucracy. Instead, it implies that the military is politically neutral in India's multiparty democracy and civilian control is established through the elected political leadership. The need of the hour is to close politico-military gap and foster mutual understanding and respect of each other requirements. At one level, this requires strengthening of strategic studies in the existing PME system. At another level, strengthening of the national educational base in strategic studies is a necessary condition to improve India's strategic performance.

Located in the Asian theatre, India's strategic challenges have been varied and perpetual. Our investment on the intellectual capital in the strategic sphere will be a significant determinant of our ability to navigate the turbulent waters of the global power shift occurring when India is still grappling with internal challenges. Updating the political and military mind with an indigenously derived strategic thought process is more critical and inexpensive than modernisation of military hardware alone. Therefore, expectantly, it will improve the probability that India's utilisation of force is guided by political wisdom and strategic prudence.

One should not miss the forest for the trees.

NOTES

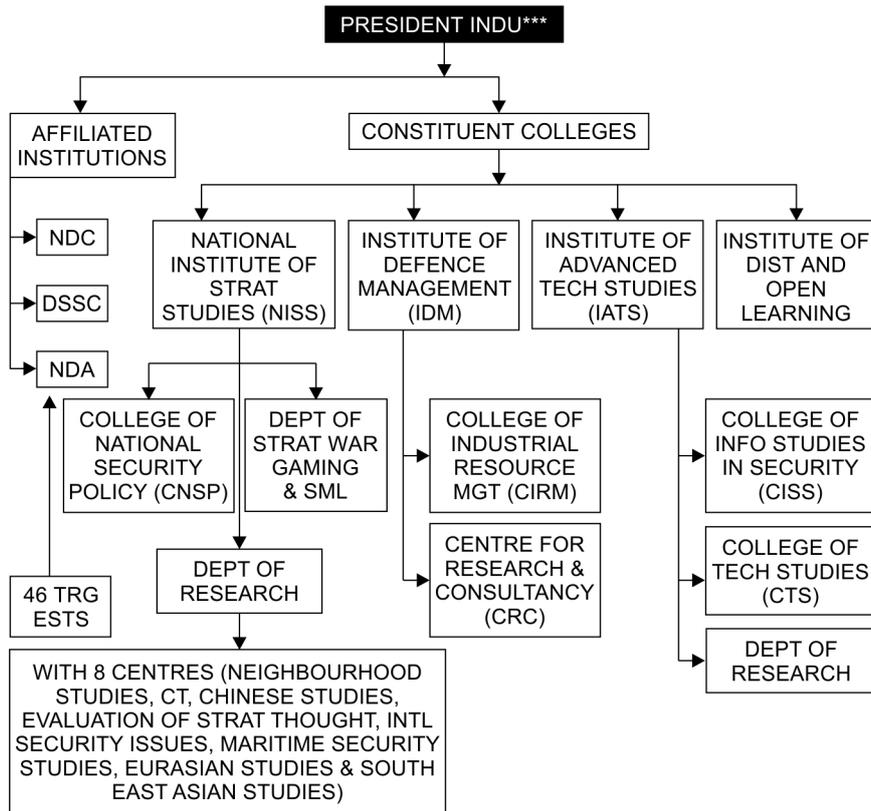
1. Introduced in 1995 as a motivating mechanism at the height of the counter-insurgency campaign in J&K, it is applicable to all units involved in conflict situations. Points earned from unit citation play a major role in the selection of units for United Nations (UN) missions. Parameters include terrorist arrested/surrendered, weapons, ammunition and war-like stores recovered, etc. Human rights violations, however, debar units.

2. This was the 1962 Sino-Indian War.
3. Military theory in terms of utility is indispensable, but in practice has to be viewed in context. See Harold R. Winton, 'An Imperfect Jewel: Military Theory and Military Profession', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 6, December 2011, pp. 853–77.
4. This author considers a revolution to be any phenomenon that cannot be countered effectively, nuclear weapons being a prime example.
5. See Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, London: Penguin, 2010, p. 267.
6. 'Theory should not accompany the general to the battlefield, that its role was educational, not prescriptive, to give insights, not to hedge the commander round with fixed solutions.' See Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz in the Twenty-first Century*, Kindle edition, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 20.
7. As of 2014, the six-monthly intake included army (230), air force (65), navy (40) and foreign (15).
8. Network-centric warfare and effects-based operations are manifestations of the belief and, like many other buzzwords emanating from Western militaries, easily find its way into Indian military lexicon, and continue to endure even after the originators have discarded them.
9. See 'The Warrior Ethos at Risk: H.R. McMaster's Remarkable Veterans Day Speech', 18 November 2014, available at <http://blogs.cfr.org/davidson/2014/11/18/the-warrior-ethos-at-risk-h-r-mcmasters-remarkable-veterans-day-speech/>, accessed on 2 December 2014.
10. See 'Lesson 4: The Inability of Technology to Substitute for the Sociocultural and Historical Knowledge Needed to Inform Understanding of the Conflict, Formulation of Strategy, and Timely Assessment', in Linda Robinson, Paul D. Miller, John Gordon IV, Jeffrey Decker, Michael Schwille and Raphael S. Cohen, *Improving Strategic Competence: Lessons from 13 Years of War*, 2014, p. 15, available at http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR800/RR816/RAND_RR816.pdf, accessed on 16 January 2015.
11. The Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), Wellington, trains 450 officers annually. The Technical Staff Officers College, Pune, trains 120 officers but is purely devoted to technical subjects.
12. Only 8 per cent of the syllabus is related to the strategic level and includes a two-day capsule on international relations.
13. The army, air force and Higher Defence Management courses have a working period of eight months, while the navy has six months.
14. Approximately 300 officers from the three services attend the Higher Command and Higher Defence Management courses each year. They comprise 10 per cent of their batches.

15. The weightage on strategic level varies across service-specific courses, from 15 per cent (army) to 20 per cent (navy).
16. See 'Cold Start Doctrine', available at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/276661/understanding-indias-cold-start-doctrine/>. The existence of such a doctrine was officially denied by General V.K. Singh, then Army Chief in January 2011.
17. The joint Higher Defence Management Course pays more attention to this aspect than the service-specific courses.
18. On the other hand, about 81 officers were doing MTech from various Indian engineering colleges in 2014.
19. *Report of the Committee of Experts to Review the Functioning of Defence and Strategic Studies and Related University System*, New Delhi, 10 January 2011. A copy of report is available with the author.
20. Ibid.
21. Ministry of Defence (MoD), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) are the three main ministries that deal with national security, as also the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).
22. *Report of Committee of Experts*, n. 19, para 16.
23. Naushad Forbes, 'Higher Education in India: Growth and Challenges', 2014, available at http://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/econ_stat/en/economics/gii/pdf/2014/gii_2014_chapter_4.pdf, accessed on 30 January 2015. Also see Ramandeep Kaur, 'The Neglected State of Humanities at School Level', 2013, available at www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/education/the-neglected-state-of-the-humanities-at-school-level-in-india, accessed on 26 October 2014.
24. This is the highest joint service institution responsible for joint training and comprises the three Vice Chiefs and the Chief of Integrated Staff.
25. The UGC is the apex body under the Ministry of Human Resource Development responsible for higher education in India.
26. In 2013, the author was involved in such an initiative headed by the former minister of human resources development, and had obtained the Lok Sabha speaker's assent. But this effort was stillborn due to the political turmoil that accompanied the Telangana state creation.
27. This is the premier think tank of the MoD.

APPENDIX

Proposed INDU



Source: Author.

