

Salient Issues Affecting Defence Manpower in India

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Manpower costs are increasingly becoming unmanageable and are driving national security planners towards thinking creatively about what used to be called 'affordable defence'. Despite leap-frogging from third to fourth generation weapons technologies in the short span of about two decades, modern armed forces are still far from being able to effect substantive reductions in manpower by substituting fighting personnel with innovative technologies while ensuring operational effectiveness. In fact, more often than not, technological solutions are proving to be costlier than the present arrangements for security. It may be quite a long wait to see which way the technology cookie crumbles. In India's case, because of the Army's extensive commitments in border management and manpower-intensive internal security duties, it is unable to undertake major reduction in its manpower. Direct personnel costs amount to almost 50 per cent of the Army's revenue budget and indirect costs add further to the burden. As the defence budget is unlikely to increase beyond 2.5 per cent of the GDP, the Army's modernisation plans have fallen way behind the required qualitative levels. It argues that there is a need to seek innovative and creative solutions to reduce the costs of manpower even if the manpower itself cannot be reduced in large numbers at present.

India's Strategic Environment

India's regional security environment is marked by Afghanistan's endless civil war despite US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention and the overthrow of the despotic Taliban regime and its tense relations with Iran and the Central Asian Republics (CARs). Pakistan's half-hearted struggle against the remnants of the al Qaeda and the Taliban, the fissiparous tendencies in Balochistan and the Pushtun heartland, the continuing rise of the cancer of radical extremism and creeping Talibanisation, the unstable civilian government, the floundering economy and, consequently, the nation's gradual slide towards becoming a 'failed state', pose a major security threat to India. The collusive nuclear weapon-cum-missile development programme of China, North Korea and Pakistan and Iran's

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The Maoist ascendancy in Nepal and its adverse impact on Nepal's fledgling democracy, as also Nepal's newfound inclination to seek neutrality

between India and China, are a blow to what has historically been a stable relationship. Simmering discontentment in Tibet and Xingjian against China's repressive regime is gathering momentum and could result in an open revolt. The peoples' nascent movement for democracy in Myanmar and several long festering insurgencies may destabilise the military Junta.

The spill over of religious extremism and terrorism from Afghanistan and political instability in the CARs (Central Asian Republics) are undermining development and governance. Other vitiating factors impacting regional stability in India's neighbourhood is unchecked proliferation of small arms which has been nurtured and encouraged by large-scale narcotics trafficking.

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India's unresolved territorial and boundary dispute with China and an un-demarcated Line of Actual Control (LAC) on the India-Tibet border do not augur well for long-term peace and stability between these two Asian giants. Though the border is relatively stable, a future border war with China, though improbable, cannot be ruled out. China's carefully orchestrated plan aimed at the strategic encirclement of India is evident from its unjustifiable opposition to India's nuclear weapons programme; its strong military support to the ruling regime in Myanmar; its diabolical assistance to the LTTE in Sri Lanka; its increasing proclivity to build and acquire ports in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea – the so-called "string of pearls" strategy; its attempts to isolate India in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and to prevent India's entry to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO); and, its relentless efforts to increase its influence in Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

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The 60-year old dispute over Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) continues to bedevil India-Pakistan relations. The Line of Control (LoC) in J&K and the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) at Siachen Glacier were perpetual flashpoints and witnessed active military hostilities for most of these 60 years.

Violations of the LoC, such as the intrusions engineered by Pakistan in the Kargil district of J&K in the summer months of 1999, are fraught with danger and have the potential to lead to full-scale conventional conflict. Also, India accuses Pakistan of sponsoring a "proxy war" through terrorist outfits nurtured by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate in J&K. With the military continuing to drive from the backseat in Pakistan, the recurrence of such misadventures remains likely, particularly if the domestic political and security situations continue to deteriorate. Pakistan's 450,000 combatant personnel remain India's foremost military threat. Progress on the India-Pakistan Composite Dialogue process has been stalled due to Pakistan's disinclination to bring to justice the perpetrators of the Mumbai terror attacks. The only positive factor is that a mutually respected cease-fire has been in place on the LoC since November 25, 2003.

Though it is an ancient civilisation, India is a young nation state that is still engaged in the process of nation building. This process has been marked by ethnic tensions, fissiparous tendencies and socio-economic challenges. India has been saddled with a long-drawn low level insurgency in J&K due to its inability to fully integrate all parts of the state with the national mainstream. Failure to find an amicable solution and end the alienation of the people of the Kashmir Valley, in particular, could have widespread repercussions in other parts of the country and in the region. Similarly, several of India's north-eastern states have been in turmoil for many decades due to political and economic neglect, poor governance and, consequently, inadequate socio-economic development. Left Wing Extremism or Maoist terrorism is the latest manifestation of India's internal instability. These internal security challenges are likely to continue to prevail over the next two decades.

The end of the Cold War led to what could be characterised as an era of strategic uncertainty. Defence planning has become more difficult in several ways. The sources and types of conflicts for which planning must be carried out have become more diverse and less predictable even as the number of potential adversaries continues to grow. The range of missions that armed forces need to undertake is expanding to include those likely to be assigned in sub-conventional conflict, including low-intensity border wars and insurgency fuelled by foreign powers.

And, the global security agenda has expanded in functional terms. Yesterday's peripheral challenges such as the security of energy sources and the threat from

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mass migrations now compete with conventional threats for a share in the defence pie. Systemic changes in the structure of the global economy, communications and military technologies are likely to alter the strategic stakes. These changes in the security paradigm are changing the strategic terms in which policymakers, military leaders and defence analysts must address long-term defence planning so as to evolve defence capabilities that will be relevant to the emerging threats. The asymmetric character of contemporary conflict

challenges conventional thinking and demands fresh responses. General Rupert Smith has identified six key trends that define modern warfare:¹ the growing role of non-state actors as well as multinational forces as combatants; looking for creative new uses for old weapons; emphasis on force protection rather than using force at any cost; the prolonged nature of modern wars; a new focus on winning the hearts and minds of people; and, a shift from absolute objectives to more flexible ones. He writes that in the Clausewitzian trinity (army, state and people), the balance between the three has changed. "There was a time when armies dominated — as they still do in the country of warlords; later, states were able to command the complete obedience of their people. Now it is the people who are in charge and the strategic objective is their hearts and minds."²

The aim of this paper is to examine the salient issues affecting the recruitment, training and retention of suitable personnel in the Indian armed forces, understanding the linkage between manpower and technology and recommending measures to reduce the cost of manpower in the light of India's strategic environment. The paper also takes stock of similar re-structuring issues across major Western armies.

Emerging Trends in International Force Levels

With economic power gradually edging out military power as the key determinant of national strength and geo-political status, international force levels have witnessed a downturn since the end of the Cold War. In planning future force levels and equipping these forces, most modern armed forces have taken their bearings from the transformation process that is underway in the United States (US) as well as the lessons of the 1991 and 2003 Gulf Wars and the intervening campaigns like the ones in Kosovo in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001. A number of emerging trends, some clear and certain, other nascent or incipient and some others that are still hazy are discernible in international force levels.

But there is one trend that is clearly discernible in the re-structuring efforts that are currently underway in most modern armed forces, It is that of qualitative upgradation of forces to Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) technologies, doctrine and organisations and their quantitative downsizing.

As military manpower becomes more and more expensive to recruit, train and retain, planners are increasingly opting for technological solutions at least in low risk areas and relying more on 'mean and lean' conventional forces for deterrence. However, at the same time, conventional forces are increasingly proving to be inadequate for facing up to the challenges of sub-conventional conflict. "In particular, Iraq, Afghanistan and Chechnya demonstrate the limitations of modern conventional forces in complex environments that depend more of them than traditional warfighting."³

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Due to the decreasing emphasis on gaining and holding territory, capability-based re-structuring of conventional forces, as opposed to the old threat-based organisations, is leading to downsizing, particularly of army fighting formations and units. Emerging threats like international fundamentalist terrorism, especially from non-state actors, are also guiding this trend. Simultaneously, the strength of reserve troops has gone up almost across the board. The transformation of conventional forces is in progress to bring them in conformity with RMA concepts and technologies. Special efforts are being made to upgrade ISR capabilities, particularly those of space-based platforms, and to attain the ability to wage network centric warfare (NCW). At the higher end of the technology trajectory the trend is towards introducing weapons platforms and ISR systems that are either completely unmanned or require minimum manpower for prolonged employment and usage.

Dr. Stephen P. Cohen, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., mentioned two drivers that are relevant to acquiring RMA capabilities:⁴ "First, the continuing and expanding use of technology to miniaturise weapons and to make them more accurate and, hence, more destructive as well as precise. Second, this costs a huge amount of money, and even the wealthiest countries cannot buy in quantities that their militaries were accustomed to, and also forces greater cooperation in weapons development. It is no longer taboo to work on vital systems in partnership with other countries. This is now catching up with India, and the craze for autarky is pretty much irrelevant."

Modern armed forces are carefully integrating individual Services to prepare them for joint warfare for greater synergy in orchestrating operations. This is invariably undertaken in the face of heavy opposition as individual Services

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resent and stubbornly resist change. The reduction in conventional force levels is leading to greater reliance on coalition warfare as nations pool in their capabilities to make for deficiencies and shortfalls and to gain diplomatic strength. However, this is not always the best solution, as coalitions tend to have disparate objectives and often lack cohesiveness.

The increasing proclivity to seek to achieve military aims and objectives by domination from the air through FGA (fighter-ground attack) aircraft and missiles is leading to enhancement of these capabilities. For example, the US and Coalition forces enforced an exclusion zone over Iraq for over a decade exclusively from the air. Rapid deployment

and rapid reaction forces are being added to the inventories of almost all the modern armies. China, for example, is in the process of upgrading one division each to the status of a rapid deployment division in all military districts. Similarly, the European Union has constituted a rapid deployment force.

There is noticeable accretion in the force levels of Special Forces the world over as greater reliance is being placed on the low-visibility employment of military force, especially against terrorist cells and fundamentalist insurgents. Some of the armed forces are gravitating towards raising specialised internal security and counter-insurgency forces as a new branch that is being added on to the existing armed forces in the country. This is being seen as a means to separate a 'lean and mean' conventional force for deterrence from fluctuating force levels for sub-conventional conflict. However, this is not yet widespread.

In some countries, in real democracies as well as those that hold sham elections or have never held an election, the trend is towards a huge expansion of paramilitary forces for internal security duties. In Asia, India leads in this reliance on second tier forces. Almost all the central police and paramilitary forces (CPMFs) like BSF, CRPF, ITBP, CISF and SSB, have added a large number of battalions to augment their fighting strength since the mid-1990s when realisation had first dawned on the military and civilian bureaucracy that insurgency and terrorism are here to stay.

The US, Japan, France, the UK and India have formulated plans to enhance strategic sealift and airlift capabilities for power projection as well as for disaster relief. Additional capabilities are being gradually created for littoral warfare and assault from the sea as the seas and oceans become more important for trade and commerce.

Special efforts are being made to reduce the logistics footprint of armed forces by outsourcing the supply and maintenance chain to civilian trade wherever it can be done without compromising operational readiness. After the American experiment in Iraq, armed forces the world over are considering outsourcing the perimeter security of airfields, logistics bases and other similar nodes and convoy protection duties, when deployed out-of-area for peacekeeping, peace-support and stabilisation operations, to private companies so as to reduce the need for the large-scale employment of regular troops on rear area security duties that are not optimally suited to their skills and training.

In view of the sophisticated hi-tech weapons systems that are now in service with almost all modern armed forces, the technological threshold of the men and women in uniform needs to be much higher than was the case even a decade ago. Hence, it is becoming increasingly more important to recruit and train well-educated youth to serve in the armed forces. Among the Services, the Navy and the Air Force need more educated personnel than the Army because of the greater complexity of their weapons systems. In fact, these Services are looking to raise entry level educational qualifications to graduation (B.A./ B.Sc.) in most trades while the Army could perhaps manage with XIIth standard pass soldiers in arms like the infantry till about 2015 or so with better training. As such personnel are likely to be found predominantly in urban areas, the recruitment base is likely to shift to such areas for Army personnel as well. In case some of the central police and para-military forces (CPMFs) also seek to upgrade their entry-level manpower, this will lead to a new set of socio-economic problems as the armed forces and the CPMFs provide fairly extensive employment opportunities to rural youth at present.

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Addressing Shortage of Officers

As India's economy is booming and lucrative career options are available to the youth in the private sector, the Indian armed forces are being increasingly faced by an acute shortage of officers. The worst affected is the Indian army that has a staggering shortage of approximately 13,000 officers out of an authorised cadre strength of about 40,000 officers. In August 2004, the Central Government had announced a proposal to select aspiring IAS and allied services candidates after the 12th standard with a view to catching them young for a career in the bureaucracy.⁵ Presumably, a new academy is proposed to be established for this purpose because the Mussoorie academy has a different charter. The best option and one that is

readily available is to train the young recruits at the National Defence Academy (NDA), Khadakvasla, Pune, which provides the finest all round education at the under-graduate level in India. In fact, it would do the budding central services officers a world of good to do some national service in the armed forces for about five years during which they would be exposed to a disciplined way of life, gain hands-on experience of man-management and good leadership, imbibe values and ethics and learn to be officers and gentlemen. They would also contribute handsomely to national security and help to reduce the officers' shortage in the armed forces.

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The most pragmatic option is for the central government to absorb all the officers scheduled for early release from the three services. The best method with multifarious benefits to the nation would be to make "military service" compulsory for all aspirants for the Central Services, including the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the Indian Police Service (IPS), other Allied Services, the Central Police and Para-military Forces (CPMFs) and other similar organisations.

Recruitment to the IAS, IFS and the Allied Services should be channelled only through the armed forces, for men as well as women. Entry into the army, the navy and the air force should be through the Combined Defence Services examination for the NDA conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). On graduating from the NDA, the cadets should receive further training at the respective academies of the three services and then join these as commissioned officers. After five years of service, all volunteer officers should be given three chances each to appear for the UPSC examinations and interviews for lateral transfer into the IAS, IFS and the Allied Services. Those who do not wish to leave or do not qualify would continue to soldier on in their respective service.

Assuming that the bait of eventual transfer to the central services would be a lucrative enough inducement for talented young men and women to join the armed forces, such a step would not only completely eliminate the shortage of officers over a few years, but also considerably enhance the quality of the junior leadership of the three services and, later, of the central services. However, such a move is bound to meet stiff resistance and would require supreme political will to implement. Since the Prime Minister is himself eager to improve the quality of intake and the training standards of the central services, he must provide the leadership to ensure that this pragmatic measure can be pushed through politically.

Graduates of the NDA receive B. Sc. degrees, as the armed forces require a fairly high threshold of the knowledge of science. The NDA syllabus can be suitably modified to accommodate the special managerial requirements of the central services. Particularly at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun, and the corresponding academies of the navy and the air force, a recognised management diploma can be included in the syllabus and, if considered necessary, the duration of training can be increased to two years to enable the Gentlemen Cadets to acquire an MBA degree.

At present, officers from the NDA get commissioned at 21 to 22 years of age. Those selected for the central services after five to seven years of active service in the armed forces would be absorbed into the IAS at about 27 to 29 years of age. This would be only marginally higher than the present average age of IAS officers on joining. Services officers joining the central services will be trained leaders of men, some of them baptised under fire, and would have had the unique privilege of commanding men – perhaps the greatest honour that any man can strive for. Above all, they will have the opportunity to serve the national cause in many strife-torn corners of the country and will gain first hand experience of the problems of the local people. Their acquaintance with and insights into the unique diversity of India's culture and traditions, reflected in the armed forces, would surely stand them in good stead in the remaining 30 to 32 years of their service.

It has been accepted by all perceptive observers of the national scene that in these times of a failing national character, with rampant corruption, political expediency and widespread nepotism ruling the roost, the three services have played a stellar role in holding the nation together as a viable political entity. A disciplined way of life, highly

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advanced and pragmatic man-management techniques, a no-nonsense approach to problem solving and active secularism, have helped the services to avoid falling prey to the maladies afflicting the other organs of the state. The officers transferring to the central services from the armed forces will carry with them these impeccable attributes and will undoubtedly succeed in transforming the manner in which the bureaucracy conducts the business of administration. Compulsory military service for entry into the central services will also give civilian bureaucrats a better understanding of India's defence and security interests and will create a permanent bond of camaraderie between the civilians and the servicemen. It is a win-win situation and an idea whose time has come.

Reducing Manpower Costs

Qualitative Upgradation versus Quantitative Re-sizing

It is now well recognised that a million strong army is unlikely to be unaffordable around the 2020-25 time frame unless modernisation is given the go by, because the costs of manpower are going up and the defence budget is continuing to decrease in constant Rupees year after year even as the cost of defence equipment is rising worldwide at the rate of 10 to 15 per cent annually. Modernisation is capital intensive and it is difficult to foresee the annual defence budget touching even three per cent of India's GDP in real terms, leave aside crossing this figure. Therefore, it must now be accepted that qualitative upgradation of the whole army is possible only if quantitative re-sizing precedes it. ("Downsizing" has become an unacceptable word that arouses passions and leads to incoherent thinking!)

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Modern technology may enable factory managers to reduce manpower through automation, but similar benefits have not yet become available to commanders directing operations in the field. State-of-the-art technology enables Reliance Industries to run a world-class multi-million tonne refinery with a mere few hundred workers but, as the US Army learnt in Iraq at great cost during Gulf War II, "boots on the ground" continue to be a critical factor even when a low-tech army is pitched against a modern, hi-tech one. So far the benefits of technology have accrued mainly in terms of creating assets that are force multipliers, enabling commanders to optimise their combat potential. Weapons technology has not yet reached a stage where it will enable gadgetry, for example Robots, to replace trained personnel. General Shankar Roychowdhury, former COAS, is sharply critical of those who disparage manpower:⁶

The Indian Army has traditionally been manpower intensive, which many modern intellectuals disparage as a hangover from the Second or even the First World War era. But it must be understood that these apparent anachronisms linger on even at present due to certain economic as well as operational compulsions. At one level, the inability of the Indian Army to shed manpower is due to the lack of resources to replace it with high-end technologies, primarily because of the generally low priority accorded to defence planning and inadequate resource allotment...

The unsatisfactory hybridisation, which created the current Reorganised Army Plains Division (RAPID), is a good example of this. In this case the divisional structure was reduced by a brigade on the assumption that the manpower thus reduced would be replaced by force multipliers and surveillance. Needless to say the resources for the technological makeover were simply never allotted.

At another level, mountain and jungle terrain in the northern and eastern regions combined with extensive deployments on counter-insurgency, established operational imperatives for organisations with adequate manpower... in New Age organisations, manpower versus technology will have to be implemented carefully and judiciously.

Manpower-intensive Internal Security Duties

Superiority in numbers has never been instrumental in winning battles. Victory on the battlefield goes to the side that can synergistically orchestrate its full combat potential at the point of decision. However, India's internal security and counter-insurgency (CI) operations are manpower intensive and, as reduction in the army's present levels of involvement in these operations does not appear to be in sight despite the raising of many new battalions of central police forces, military planners cannot be expected to effect major reductions in manpower. Therefore, no military analyst can recommend a reduction in force levels unless the external and internal security environment is seen to improve substantially. Answering a question regarding reduction in the strength of the standing army in an interview, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said, "In view of the current commitments, I do not think it is possible to reduce the strength of the army."⁷

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Catch 22! Hence, it is a Catch 22 situation. The army cannot reduce manpower because of its commitments in low intensity conflict (LIC) and it cannot modernise and improve the quality of

its forces unless it reduces its manpower strength because its huge numbers are a drain on the defence budget. Perhaps the answer lies in reducing the costs of manpower even if the number of personnel cannot be reduced as yet. The fundamental challenge is to find ways and means to maintain a force structure capable of dealing with today's realities and still generate sufficient resources to invest in modernisation and military technologies that are crucial to tomorrow's battlefield. As expenditure on manpower accounts for over 50 percent of the army's budget, all possible avenues need to be explored to save manpower costs without compromising operational preparedness.

Realising that additional funds for modernisation were becoming increasingly difficult to come by, as COAS in 1998, General V. P. Malik had unilaterally ordered the "suppression" of 50,000 personnel (approximately 5 per cent) of the Field Force. This was affected against opposition within the army by asking all units to accept being under-posted by 3 to 7 per cent of their authorised strength. Over a period of about two years, new recruitment was curtailed to reduce the strength. The aim was to utilise the saved funds (Rs 500 crore @ Rs 1,00,000 per soldier) for modernisation. However, the Kargil conflict forced General Malik's successor to reverse this decision. Similarly, in 1996-97, a committee headed by Lt Gen S. Chandrashekhar, GOC-in-C, Central Command, had recommended the reduction of about 20,000 to 30,000 personnel from the Non-field Force so that these personnel could be re-deployed to raise new force multiplier units as it has consistently been the Government policy to tell the army to find personnel for new raisings from within its own resources, without asking for the manpower ceiling to be raised. Because of the need felt during the Kargil conflict, some of these like certain units of the Pioneer Corps too had to be re-instated.

Large-scale TA-isation

Several viable options can be considered to reduce the strength of the standing army without compromising on operational preparedness though each one of these would need to be thought through logically to eliminate its disadvantages. Large-scale "TA-isation" of the army offers a lucrative opportunity to save on manpower costs by reducing the number of regular army personnel in service and increasing the number of Territorial Army (TA) personnel. TA battalions have performed creditably in the post-independence conflicts and are continuing to do so in CI operations in J&K and in the north-eastern states. An infantry battalion TA requires approximately 50 to 60 regular personnel to form the nucleus; the rest are TA personnel. It should be possible to employ TA battalions in defensive operations to hold ground in depth in the second and the third tier of defences and, eventually, where permitted by the tactical situation, even in less threatened areas in the front line. It does not need to be emphasised that the present fighting capabilities and the equipment profile of TA units will need to be substantially upgraded. The TA

units will have to be embodied for much longer than the present 45 days annually to enable them to be better trained. They will also need to participate in operational alerts and manoeuvres with troops. The time has come to recognise and exploit the true war-fighting potential of TA units.

Regular Units into TA

The other aspect of TA-isation is to convert some regular Indian Army units to TA units. Besides infantry battalions, field and Corps of Army Air Defence TA units have existed in the past in India. Even today the British Army, that has been downsized and has only two deployable active service divisions, places immense reliance on TA units for almost all arms and services. In the initial stages the concept could be tried out with infantry battalions. It may be more prudent to convert one or two rifle companies to TA companies rather than convert a whole battalion. When the concept has been found to be successful after the teething problems have been ironed out, it could be extended to other arms like the armoured corps, artillery, Corps of Army Air Defence, engineers, signals and mechanised infantry. Since all of these arms have equipment-intensive holdings, innovative methods will have to be devised to keep the TA soldiers well drilled in handling their equipment and to ensure that the equipment is well maintained. There will be heavy resistance within the army to the implementation of such a concept. Commanders with deeply entrenched mindsets will warn against the dangers of such a venture and will question the operational preparedness of such units even after a three to six month warning period for training. However, it is a concept whose time has come and it will be better for the army to begin planning its implementation in-house rather than have it imposed from without. It will not be an easy concept to implement and many challenges will have to be overcome, but then nothing new is ever easy.

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Reliance on the TA-isation concept to effect savings in manpower costs will require the enactment of a new Indian Territorial Forces Act with stringent provisions for ensuring that the presence of TA personnel can be guaranteed whenever they are called up for service. Employers' accountability for sparing their TA employees will have to be ensured by making employers liable for prosecution. Perhaps the most important statutory change required to make the re-vamped TA combat worthy at all times would be to make TA service compulsory for all Central Government employees. This would

require a bold political initiative, but one from which no nationalistic political party concerned with the nation's security should shy away.

Placing Formations in Suspended Animation

Another concept, which is resisted tooth and nail but merits serious consideration, is that of placing whole formations in suspended animation. The logic behind this concept is simple. Not all formations and units are required to be in a state of immediate operational readiness at all times to ensure the territorial integrity of the nation since wars are now unlikely to breakout virtually overnight. There would normally be a long gestation period during which an endeavour would be made to resolve contentious issues through bilateral as well as multilateral or United Nations (UN)-sponsored diplomatic negotiations. If this line of argument finds acceptance, it should be possible to downgrade the readiness standards of certain formations earmarked for offensive operations. These would have to be carefully selected. The *modus operandi* would be that while the command and control elements and a core group of essential personnel are retained to maintain equipment (most of which would be moth-balled) and warlike stores and to ensure the upkeep of barracks, the remaining personnel would be reservists who would be called up only when war clouds appear over the strategic horizon. However, they would be periodically trained to hone their skills and to keep them in touch with their planned wartime trades.

Reduction in Colour Service

However, an obvious question is this: how can such an arrangement be practically worked out? The solution is as simple as it is attractive. Colour service in the army could be reduced to seven years, as it used to be in the bygone years. On release from the Army, the other ranks (OR) could be absorbed *in toto* by the Central Police Organisations (CPOs — BSF, CRPF, CISF, ITBP *et al*). They should continue to serve in the CPOs till superannuation, as per the prevailing terms and conditions of service. On transfer to the CPOs, the army should have a lien on their service as reservists for a period of eight to 10 years. During this period, the reservists would be put through refresher cadres, annual training camps and occasional courses. During national emergencies they could be called up whenever required to fill all the vacancies in their old units. Depending on the arm and the type of equipment held they could be licked into shape as a top-grade fighting unit in three to six months.

Younger Profile

No matter how closely one analyses this proposal, it appears to be a win-win situation. The Army would have a much younger profile; the Other Ranks would continue to have gainful employment till the standard age of superannuation; the

CPOs would be able to induct trained Army manpower and would in due course develop the army ethos and work ethic that is so necessary for them to operate successfully in a surcharged internal security environment. The exchequer would save millions of Rupees of the taxpayers' money by being able to cut down on pension bills. Doubtlessly, there would be stubborn resistance to the implementation of this proposal from various vested interests. They will have to be convinced, cajoled, prodded and, if necessary, browbeaten into submission!

Improving “Teeth-to-Tail” Ratio

The logistics chain of the Field Force is an area where some reduction in manpower numbers is still possible, combined with corresponding reductions in stocking levels of FOL, rations and spares with arrangements to push forward the required stores quickly when necessary. The inventory of some equipment like ‘B’ vehicles could also be reduced to some extent as these are now being mainly procured indigenously directly from the manufacturers. As these companies also sell similar models in the market, it should be possible for them to commit stepped up production at short notice to meet rising demands of the armed forces during national emergencies. Similarly, various other aspects of logistics support must be critically examined so as to cut the flab and streamline the supply chain.

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It is encouraging to note that the Army HQ has taken several initiatives to improve the archaic logistics system that goes back to World War II. In response to a question regarding the steps that the army proposes to take to enhance logistics support and reduce costs, Lt Gen S. Patabhraman, VCOAS, stated:⁸

There is always an effort to improve the teeth-to-tail ratio of the army by reducing the logistics tail. Dependence on dedicated logistics units needs to be reduced gradually by deploying logistics nodes and centralised repair and maintenance facilities on a grid basis. Further, due to induction of more and more COTS technology equipment, infrastructure and facilities ex-trade have to be made use of to cut down the size of logistics units. The fruits of development are reaching the fringes of our border states resulting in availability of better infrastructure, which the army too can harness for its logistics needs. The availability of medical facilities in border areas could help in reducing the size of integral field medical units. Similarly, today the trade is even prepared to maintain and repair equipment well forward under most difficult conditions; this could help in reducing the size of integral engineering support workshops. Better rail and road communication infrastructure in forward areas will also help in reducing the logistics tail.”

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Ex-servicemen's Transport Corporation With the development of better roads and other infrastructure in the border areas, massive investments in "third line" and in some cases even "second line" transport are no longer necessary. The army can easily requisition thousands of trucks in a short period of time and can save on both manpower as well as vehicle holding costs. Obviously, as far as second line transport is concerned, a certain number of 4x4 vehicles capable of cross-country movement will still be required. For these, the Government can float an Ex-servicemen's Transport Corporation that should be a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) on the lines of the Container Corporation of India so that the vehicles can be used for commercial purposes during peace time and provided to the army during war and for internal security duties and counter-insurgency operations. Such a corporation will provide post-retirement employment to a large number of drivers.

Out-sourcing of Logistics Support

There are various other methods of reducing the cost of manpower. Establishments like advance base workshops can be easily wound up as civilian companies can perform the same tasks at perhaps half the cost. However, it would be a politically sensitive decision. Similarly, the cost of holding large inventories in Ordnance Depots needs to be drastically pruned by outsourcing the procurement and delivery of low-cost, fast-moving ordnance items to the private sector. A comprehensive study should be ordered by Army HQ to examine these issues holistically to make rational, practicable recommendations. Of course, there is a point up to which some calculated risks can be taken while planning for operations and logistics support; beyond that, such moves become counter-productive. Decision making for reducing the cost of logistics support requires detailed cost-benefit analyses through a comprehensive study of the logistics requirements in each theatre of operations. The days of doing things on a Mughal scale are over.

The logistics services must shape up to reduce the cost of providing logistics support. Despite the Non-Field Force Study done in 1997-98 and the consequent manpower cuts, there is still plenty of flab in the logistics services. It is time the army graduated to just-in-time logistics. The war and peace establishments of various HQ also have plenty of surplus staff authorised to them. Army HQ tops this list and could easily be pruned to the extent of almost 30 to 40 per cent without material reduction in efficiency. These issues are as relevant as those that have been discussed and merit detailed scrutiny for re-structuring.

Conclusion

Manpower costs are increasingly becoming unmanageable and are driving national security planners towards thinking creatively about what used to be called 'affordable defence'. Despite leap-frogging from third to fourth generation weapons technologies in the short span of about two decades, modern armed forces are still far from being able to effect substantive reductions in manpower by substituting fighting personnel with innovative technologies while ensuring operational effectiveness. In fact, more often than not, technological solutions are proving to be costlier than the present arrangements for security. It may be quite a long wait to see which way the technology cookie crumbles.

In India's case, because of the Army's extensive commitments in border management and manpower-intensive internal security duties, it is unable to undertake major reduction in its manpower. Direct personnel costs amount to almost 50 per cent of the Army's revenue budget and indirect costs add further to the burden. As the defence budget is unlikely to increase beyond 2.5 per cent of the GDP, the Army's modernisation plans have fallen way behind the required qualitative levels. There is a need to seek innovative and creative solutions to reduce the costs of manpower even if the manpower itself cannot be reduced in large numbers at present. The Navy and the Air Force are already finding it difficult to retain trained manpower as opportunities are opening up in the private sector. Air Force pilots, in particular, are getting lucrative offers from the new airlines that are mushrooming by the day. The personnel challenges being faced by the Indian armed forces are extremely complex but certainly not insurmountable. With modern HRD techniques and wholehearted government support these can be systematically overcome.

There is a need to seek innovative and creative solutions to reduce the costs of manpower even if the manpower itself cannot be reduced in large numbers at present.

There is an inescapable need to adopt innovative measures to cut manpower costs while raising the quality of manpower entering the armed forces. These include placing of selected formations in suspended animation except for a core nucleus, reducing the colour service to seven years and transferring personnel to the CPMFs, large-scale TA-isation at battalion level and improvement in the teeth to tail ratio by outsourcing less hazardous functions such as logistics support to civilian trade and harnessing the latent potential of ex-servicemen for the national cause by employing them meaningfully after their retirement, for example by raising a national transport corporation. The ongoing officers' shortage can be

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eliminated by making national service compulsory for all aspirants to the IAS and allied services. Unless some of these measures are adopted, manpower costs will continue to bite into the meager funds available for military modernisation. 

Notes:

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