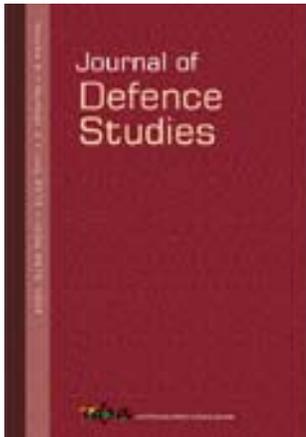


Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

No.1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg
Delhi Cantonment, New Delhi-110010



Journal of Defence Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.idsa.in/journalofdefencestudies>

Defence Reforms after 1962: Much Ado about Nothing

P.R. Chari

To cite this article: P.R. Chari (2012): Defence Reforms after 1962: Much Ado about Nothing, Journal of Defence Studies, Vol-6, Issue-4.pp- 171-188

URL: http://www.idsa.in/jds/6_4_2012_DefenceReformsafter1962MuchAdoaboutNothing_PRChari

Please Scroll down for Article

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.idsa.in/termsfuse>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

Views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or of the Government of India.

Defence Reforms after 1962 Much Ado about Nothing

*P.R. Chari**

How have commentators perceived India's defeat in the Sino-Indian border conflict of 1962? What were its underlying reasons? Can the entire blame be cast on China for its surprise attack? Or, were India's thoughtless actions also responsible? After touching on these questions, this article describes the defence reforms undertaken by India after the border conflict in 1962 in the light of the shortcomings and deficiencies highlighted. Three issues are highlighted, namely, civil-military relations, the failure of intelligence and the structural defects existing in the higher defence decision-making process. What were the defence reforms effected to address these issues, and were they adequate is then discussed before reaching conclusions.

SETTING THE STAGE

Is it possible to walk backwards into the future? Or, drive forward looking in the rear-view mirror? And, is the adage true that history only teaches us that we learn nothing from history? These questions are central to this article which attempts to evaluate the defence reforms undertaken after India's traumatic defeat in the Sino-Indian border conflict of 1962. What were the shortcomings and deficiencies highlighted by this disaster? These issues will be addressed along three parameters. What were the problems that came to light, first, regarding civil-military relations in 1962; second, the failures of intelligence noticed; and third, the structural

* The author is Visiting Professor, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi; Former Director, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (1975–80); and Former Director, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (2000–04).

ISSN 0976-1004 print

© 2012 Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 6, No. 4, October 2012, pp. 171–188



defects found in the higher defence decision-making processes. How were they addressed? What were the defence reforms effected to address them, and were they relevant and adequate to address these deficiencies?

DIAGNOSING THE AILMENT

Before addressing these questions, we might notice how earlier commentators have reflected on India's debacle in the Sino-Indian border conflict of 1962, and perceived its underlying reasons. A clear dichotomy is apparent between those who lay the blame on China for its unprovoked and treacherous assault on an unsuspecting and unprepared India, and those who believe India's feckless actions invited the violent Chinese reaction; the blame is then laid by them on Nehru's naivete compounded by Krishna Menon's insensitivity and abrasiveness. Objective analysis is made difficult by the veil of secrecy that surrounds the operational records like after-action reports and regimental histories pertaining to the border conflict, apart from the relevant files in South Block. New Delhi has strenuously resisted all attempts to declassify the Henderson Brooks report submitted in mid-1963 that went into various aspects of this conflict.¹ Even the official history of the conflict, prepared with great effort and much expense, remains a 'Restricted' document, which cannot be discussed or cited.

The files leading up to and pertaining to the 1962 conflict should be available in the Ministries of Defence, Services Headquarters, Ministry of External Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office. But, it is unlikely that they will ever be declassified and transferred to the National Archives, although the statutory period for their retention in the respective offices (20 years in India) has long expired. An individual decision has to be taken on each file thereafter to decide if their continued classification is in the national interest, giving cogent reasons for this conclusion. It is unclear whether this onerous exercise has ever been undertaken, since a blanket ban is operating to deny the public any access to these records. Nor is it likely that this ban will be lifted with successive governments in New Delhi being concerned with survival rather than governance.

In these circumstances, reliance has to be placed on the memoirs of participants and contemporary observers to deconstruct the events and decisions that precipitated the Sino-Indian border conflict. Atypical of the nationalist interpretation is the severe indicting of China for its unprovoked aggression. Nehru's official biographer, S. Gopal, has concluded, for instance, that:

Taken by surprise by the sudden onslaughts, India had hastily to put together troops based in diverse places and rush them to the freezing Himalayan ranges. These men were neither trained nor equipped for this kind of fighting and were sent into battle short of weapons, warm clothing and boots to fight an enemy far superior in numbers and in firepower.²

It might be added that Gopal criticized B.M. Mullik, then Director of the Intelligence Bureau (DIB), who advised that:

‘...the Chinese would move into areas claimed by them when there was no Indian presence, but would keep away if Indian personnel had established themselves; the Chinese, it was thought, were unlikely to use force against any Indian post even if in a position to do so. No one questioned either the credentials of the Intelligence Bureau to provide advice rather than information, or the unjustified jump in the logic of its argument, that Chinese reluctance to engage in confrontation in the past necessarily guaranteed such inactivity in the future.’³

Gopal also informs that the general staff had warned that the army was in no position to undertake operations against China in the event of a border confrontation, but this was ignored by Krishna Menon, who probably did not share this vital information with Nehru.⁴

Gopal’s version of events is broadly corroborated by Major General D.K. Palit, who adds that the DIB was probably unaware that the internal situation in China had dramatically improved in the ad interim period; hence Mullik’s belief that it was too preoccupied by domestic problems to contemplate foreign adventures was no longer true.⁵ The especial value of Palit’s account is its unembellished account of the incompetence that led to the disaster in *North-East Frontier Agency* (NEFA)—an appendix details the events leading to the loss of Sela and Bomdila; it would assuredly have led to the loss of Assam if the Chinese had not decided to offer a unilateral ceasefire and withdraw to their positions before the hostilities began.

An apologia for the 1962 debacle has been offered by Lieutenant General (Lt Gen) L.P. Sen who concludes that: ‘It would be more correct to describe that action as the defeat of a handful of troops of the Indian Army, composed of four Brigades, which attempted to combat four Chinese divisions over a frontage of 600 miles of most inhospitable terrain... a truncated Corps Headquarters moved in.’⁶ On the other hand, another military observer has noted: ‘Our shortcomings were glossed

over by exaggerated reports of Chinese strength. There was much talk of their human wave tactics and of course their automatic rifles, while our forces still had rifles of Second World War vintage.⁷ Undeniably, however, the Chinese troops were well trained, suitably equipped and prepared for mountain warfare. Deception was an ingrained aspect of their tactics. One example. The Chinese had personnel fluent in Indian languages; they would shout out orders and messages at night to confuse the Indian soldiers—the particular language used being that with which the particular infantry unit was conversant. Another tactic used was to rustle dry bushes at night in the flanks or to the rear of Indian positions to induce panic and encourage wild firing leading to wastage of limited ammunition supplies.

An account by a civilian official informs that an ‘aged and worn out Nehru’ had only Krishna Menon as his sole adviser, who was allergic to the United States (US), to pursue a policy of ‘unalloyed’ non-alignment. Nor were they prepared to approach the Soviet Union out of fear that the price demanded might be too high. ‘A consequence [of this situation] was a deliberate playing down of the threat posed by China, a policy of drift with regard to Defense and a complete lack of recognition of the magnitude or urgency of the danger.’⁸ The result of this insouciance was policy paralysis, which, tragically, also has a contemporary resonance.

In view of these conflicting versions of the 1962 conflict, it is unsurprising that Neville Maxwell’s account of the 1962 conflict⁹ has gained greater credence than the official accounts in the public domain. It is apparent that Maxwell had privileged access to classified information in the Ministry of Defence and Army Headquarters.¹⁰ What Maxwell reveals about the origins of the Sino-Indian border conflict confirms Gopal’s account, in that Mullik’s ill-advised ‘Forward Policy’ was responsible. It was approved by Nehru and Krishna Menon, and became their policy to secure China’s eviction from the border territory claimed by India. Indeed, Maxwell notes that:

The psychological bedrock upon which the forward policy rested was the belief that in the last resort the Chinese military, snuffing from a bloody nose, would pack up and leave the territory India claimed. The source of that faith was Mullik, who from the beginning to the end proclaimed the oracular truth that, whatever the Indians did, there need be no fear of a violent Chinese reaction.¹¹

Informed speculation became Biblical truth.

Henry Kissinger also indicts the Forward Policy for triggering the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962, and notes that once Mao Tse-tung had concluded that war was the best option available, China began with 'thorough analysis: careful preparation; attention to psychological and political factors; quest for surprise; and rapid conclusion'.¹² Further, although the border remains disputed, neither side has sought to improve its position, nor has there been any real threat of another conflict.

The three critical issues identified earlier to analyse the reform process after the border conflict are reviewed next. Some comment is then necessary to depict how the situation that obtained in 1962 has further evolved. It would essentially be argued that this event, though traumatic, did not engender any radical or even essential reforms. Indeed, as the French saying goes, the more things change the more they remain the same.

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

This was the milieu obtaining in the defence establishment after India's traumatic defeat in 1962: a blame game started with the political, civilian and military establishments accusing each other of incompetence, naivete and worse. Civil-military relations had, in fact, crumbled before the 1962 conflict. The Indian Army was aware of, but was not consulted, on the military and strategic implications of the Forward Policy that started in 1959. Neither was it provided the wherewithal to counter its possible consequences. Nor was it asked about the feasibility of executing the orders issued by the prime minister, and later the Ministry of Defence, to evict the Chinese from Indian territory. Were any operational plans available for executing this order? Was the logistical support available like roads, war wastage reserves, transport, clothing and so on? Clearly, no assessment had been made by the Ministry of Defence and Army Headquarters of these requirements, much less to establish them. Very importantly, the *bhai-bhai* syndrome was continuing; hence the troops were not psychologically conditioned to treat China as the enemy, which had reflected in the operations.

Proceeding further, Jawaharlal Nehru had to face down a rebellion within the ruling Congress party in 1962 and was forced to abandon Krishna Menon. Y.B. Chavan—Chief Minister of Maharashtra—was brought into the Cabinet as Defence Minister. The initial challenge confronting Chavan was to assuage the bruised egos in South Block, adjudicate between mutual accusations and restore a semblance of

normality in the higher echelons of the defence machinery. Almost the first change effected by Chavan was to start the institution of morning meetings, which are now a tradition in the ministry. They were intended to provide an informal forum for consultations between the ministers in the Ministry of Defence, chiefs of the three services, secretaries in the Ministry of Defence and the financial adviser. The intention was to ensure that issues requiring immediate attention would be promptly addressed. But the unstated purpose of these meetings was to reconcile the various estranged adjuncts of the higher defence management structure so that they might develop a personal rapport and work harmoniously with each other. This modality has continued over the intervening years, since it possesses an intrinsic relevance.

Over the years, the cabinet secretary has become a permanent invitee to these meetings and his presence ensures the cooperation of the concerned ministries in the Government of India to the defence effort. In retrospect, conceiving of these morning meetings was probably the most important reform undertaken after 1962. Indeed, ensuring close coordination between civilian and military officials at every level of the civil and military bureaucracies is most essential for national security. But, it has proven quite elusive. For instance, the establishment of coordination committees in Kashmir and north-east India to deal with counter-insurgency operations has not been very successful. Demands are being made by the civilian administration for withdrawal the armed forces from these 'disturbed' areas, which is resisted by the army on security considerations, which guarantees only minimal cooperation between them.

This situation of mistrust can be traced back to post-independence developments. According to Stephen Cohen:

In India civil-military affairs quickly resolved themselves [after independence] into a three-cornered relationship between young Indian officers, none of whom had served in a rank higher than brigadier during World War II, members of the civil service (very few of whom had served in the Defense Ministry or had been connected with military matters under the British), and the political leaders who had even less defense experience.¹³

But, one would hesitate to accept his further contention that 'a fairly effective alliance between the civil service and the politicians' was forged to whittle down the role of the military in the decision-making process. He might have appreciated that the changes made to assert the role of the

civil elements in the defence decision-making process was inevitable after India gained independence. It reflected the democratic transition that had taken place, and the need to embed civil-military relations within a post-colonial matrix.¹⁴

It is possible, of course, that the precipitate manner in which these changes were brought about caused resentments in the Indian Army. More could also have been done, perhaps, at the interpersonal level, by consciously promoting institutional efforts to foster rapport between civil and military officials. A hallowed tradition obtained before and during the early years after independence was that newly posted officers called on their counterparts and one-step-above seniors in the ministry/services headquarters. This tradition gradually weakened. Whether the service chiefs called on the defence secretary or vice versa became an issue. Whether they would attend each other's meetings became a matter for endless debate. Thus, an act of courtesy came to be perceived, most egregiously, as an admission of subordination. In the districts likewise, the tradition was for a newly posted civilian official to call on the mess, if any, in the district, and be invited on a suitable social occasion to come and meet the other officers in the station. Another tradition was that ex-servicemen's grievances were to be given priority by civilian officials. A small gesture, but meeting them before the other petitioners during the daily meetings with *mulakatis* went a long way to establishing civil-military rapport. Civil-military liaison meetings to rehearse law and order situations have become another casualty of neglect.

Ironically, the situation obtaining after the 1962 conflict has a parallel in the malaise currently bedevilling the defence establishment. The date of birth controversy involving the former Chief of the Army Staff, General V.K. Singh, was further complicated by senior serving and retired generals levying serious charges of favouritism and corruption against each other. The quiescent role played by the Ministry of Defence has widened the chasm between the political and military leaderships, reflecting their mutual lack of trust. Insinuations of 'defence preparedness' being neglected has only increased the general unease, while leakage of the long-term acquisition plans of the Air Force has serious implications for national security. Charges and countercharges of malfeasance have been levelled against the highest officials in the military hierarchy. General V.K. Singh is currently on bail and faces prosecution in a case of criminal defamation. A loss of morale obtains in the armed forces, and great disillusionment pervades the country.

THE FAILURE OF INTELLIGENCE

We noticed in the section on diagnosing the ailment that an unshakeable conviction imbued the Indian leadership, reposing in Jawaharlal Nehru and vocalized by Krishna Menon,¹⁵ that whatever else occurred, China would not attack. This belief system occasioned the failure to objectively evaluate the Chinese threat. It is arguable that their judgement was swayed by the devastating famine in China consequent to Chairman Mao's ill-conceived Great Leap Forward campaign, which made it improbable that they would contemplate any foreign adventure. In his memoirs, published much after Nehru's death and Menon's removal, Mullik disowns responsibility for his Forward Policy, alleging that both leaders failed to act despite specific intelligence being provided to them in 1962 about the likelihood of China attacking.¹⁶ Whatever one conjectures from these self-exculpatory accounts, what stands out is the fixation in India at the political and military levels in 1962 that whatever else happened, China would not attack.¹⁷

Quite clearly, the institutional arrangements for intelligence assessment at that time were wholly inadequate. A Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) was functioning under the Chiefs of Staff Committee, and was headed by a joint secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. The JIC included the heads of intelligence from the three services and representatives of the Ministries of Defence and Home Affairs. Apparently, it only met fitfully. It was decided after 1962 to strengthen the JIC and place it within the Cabinet Secretariat, under an additional secretary-level officer. The members (joint secretary-level officers) were drawn from the Ministries of External Affairs, Home Affairs and Defence, apart from the three service intelligence chiefs and representatives of the IB and Border Security Force. This strengthened JIC became the ultimate intelligence evaluation body in the government. Its reports, both initiated internally or tasked by a steering committee comprising the concerned ministries, had high visibility, if not salience, in decision making.

However, the weaknesses of the JIC became painfully evident. For one, the chairmen generally had neither knowledge nor interest in intelligence matters—it was just another posting for most of them—which was also true of their supporting staff drawn from the three services. Everyone was rotated after two or three years in line with the tenure principle. No attempt was made to either train the staff or undertake lateral entry to draw on outside talent. Further, the members of the JIC rarely felt they were part of an intelligence collectivity, but more as representatives

of their respective organizations.¹⁸ In the result, amateur assessments were produced or the draft reports prepared by one or other ministry/intelligence agency was accepted and finalized. Slowly, but surely, the JIC lost its *elan*. The agencies began withholding graded information and started submitting 'special reports' to high personages, sometimes on demand, but more often for institutional aggrandizement or self-promotion.

No lessons were learnt therefore from the intelligence fiasco in 1962. Witness the inability of the intelligence agencies and the Indian defence establishment to anticipate Pakistan's intrusions into Kutch in April 1965 or its infiltration of intruders into Kashmir in September 1965 that precipitated the Indo-Pak war. Or, the inability of all concerned to detect Pakistan's cross-Line of Control intrusions across the Kargil–Drass sector in early 1999. The record of the Indian assessment agencies has been near perfect! In 1971, the initiative had passed into India's hands with Pakistan, obligingly, making one grievous mistake after another: like alienating all segments of the Bengali population in East Pakistan; and imprisoning Mujibur Rahman in West Pakistan, which aggravated the Bengali revolt. But, the location of an entire Pakistani division remained unknown till the war ended. The short point being made here is the similarity of these intelligence failures. In all these cases, India's intelligence and security agencies knew the facts; their collation was effected; what failed was their assessment. Why?

The basic problem derived from the prevailing 'conception' or preconceived notion underlying all analysis. For example, the 'conception' in New Delhi before the Sino-Indian border conflict was framed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Krishna Menon. Its basic premise was that the Chinese would not attack. In 1999, the 'conception' was that the Line of Control was impassable in winter; hence, cross-border intrusions at this time were unthinkable. Yet, Kargil happened.

A global study of surprise attacks and the failure of intelligence to anticipate them found a recurring problem in distinguishing true warning signals from background 'noise'. But, surprise attacks had succeeded when strategic assumptions of possibilities (China will never attack) did not converge with tactical assumptions of actualities (Chinese deployments in Tibet, induction of trained soldiers, pattern of equipment and so on).¹⁹ This problem manifested itself in several cases of successful surprise attacks, like Operation Barbarossa (1941) when Stalin was convinced that the Germans would never attack the Soviet Union without delivering an

ultimatum; Pearl Harbor (1942) when Roosevelt assumed that Japan was too vulnerable militarily to challenge the US; the US ruling out Chinese intervention (1950) in the Korean War when General MacArthur decided to cross the Yalu river; the Yom Kippur War (1973) when Israel convinced itself that its Arab neighbours lacked the confidence to initiate hostilities; and the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962, apart from the Kargil conflict.

In all these instances, a governing 'conception' obtained that the enemy will not take the initiative or attack, but they did the unanticipated at a time and place of their choosing, leading to surprise and distress. In other words, national convictions can dominate national thought that some improbable event will never happen; but the adversary chose to think the unthinkable. The lesson to be drawn from these disasters is that assessments of national security threats cannot be cast in stone, but must be kept under constant review. Neither can they be left to individuals or coteries; democratizing threat assessments has a certain innate wisdom.

Apropos, the JIC has undergone several avatars. An ill-judged attempt was made to separate external and internal intelligence by establishing two separate JICs; these were placed under officers of the IB and Research and Analysis Wing. The arrangement was unworkable since the areas of overlap were numerous. Finally, both JICs were merged again. Currently, the JIC is part of the National Security Council and functions under one of the deputy National Security Advisers.

THE HIGHER MANAGEMENT OF DEFENCE

The rationale for preserving the present Indian higher defence management structure is that it has withstood the test of time—witness India's spectacular victory in the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict. It was envisaged by Lord Ismay in 1947, who patterned this structure on the British pre-war establishment. It was recommended to Nehru by Lord Mountbatten, who accepted these suggestions. But the inadequacies of this structure were plainly revealed in 1962, since it had compartmentalized the civil and military bureaucracies into silos with hardly any coordination between them to ensure harmonious working. Moreover, the British higher defence management system has constantly reformed to move with the times. Several Royal Commissions of Inquiry have examined the higher defence management system in United Kingdom (UK) and recommended changes that were effected. For instance, a procurement executive was set up in 1971 'to establish a coherent organization to tackle the whole range of problems inherent in the development and production,

within the resources expected to be made available of equipment for the Services, including many complex systems which call for research into new areas of technology'.²⁰ Efforts to establish a similar organization in India have still to bear fruit, with the 'offsets' issue yet to resolve itself.

Furthermore, in line with established tradition, the British government had accepted and implemented the recommendations made by Royal Commissions, unless serious reasons could be shown for their rejection. In India, the tradition established is that Inquiry Commissions are designed to deflect public criticism. Interminable delays in submitting their reports are the rule, since neither the government nor the commission members, who are enjoying their sinecure, are interested in ending their labours. When finally received, the recommendations are treated as suggestions and routinely rejected or consigned to the back burner until forgotten.

What was obtaining in 1962, and continues, is the rigid separation of defence planning and budgeting within the Ministry of Defence, while operational planning and execution is left to the services headquarters. Each and every directorate in the services headquarters is replicated in the sections and wings of the Defence Ministry, with Ministry of Defence (Finance) being the third wheel in this administrative structure. Proposals emanate from the services headquarters, and those of signal importance are cleared at the highest levels, which could be the service chief. But, in the Ministry of Defence, they are 'examined' at the lowest level, which could be an upper division clerk or section officer. This may seem anomalous. But the reality could be that these personages, apart from officers of the armed forces headquarters service, are probably the most qualified to 'examine' the files.

No effort has been made to train officers of the higher civil services in defence and national security issues, despite the First Administrative Reforms Commission (chaired by Morarji Desai) having suggested this as far back as the late 1960s. It had, in fact, urged the formation of a Defence Management Service that would man relevant positions in the Defence, Home, External Affairs Ministries and the Cabinet Secretariat. It was unceremoniously shelved because Desai was by then (1971) on the wrong side of the political divide.²¹ Hence, civilian officers posted to the Ministry of Defence often possess hardly any knowledge of defence and security issues. Neither is it certain that civilian officers, who have served tenure in the Ministry of Defence, will ever be posted back at later stages in their careers. Unfortunately, even civilian officers who undergo a year's sojourn in the National Defence College are rarely posted to the

Ministry of Defence; more usually than not, this sojourn is intended to accommodate their personal needs rather than achieve any administrative objectives. In earlier years, civilian officers were also deputed to the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington, but this practice has been discontinued.

Many instances are known of defence secretaries being appointed without any knowledge, or experience, or interest in defence and security issues with disastrous results.²² The results were predictable. There is the celebrated case of the defence secretary who was asked by the Estimates Committee to explain India's Defence Policy. His reply, a model of inanity, stated that:

...India's Defense Policy, to the extent that I can venture to make a statement from 1947 onwards, more precisely from 1950 onwards, has been basically a policy to defend our territory, our sovereignty and our freedom and no more than that. But, from time to time, vis-à-vis our immediate neighbors, vis-à-vis Bangladesh at a point of [*sic*] time and vis-à-vis Sri Lanka more recently, the policy proceeded to grapple with the problem as it arose.²³

No wonder the Estimates Committee published this reply in full.

This amateur approach to the higher management of defence guarantees a suboptimal system obtaining; hence, personality differences have gained salience over substantive issues. Civilian officers with little or no knowledge, or interest, in defence and security issues have often displayed an abnormal interest in personnel issues like promotions, disciplinary cases and so on that could lead to either close collaboration or conflict with services headquarters—both contingencies are inimical to the defence effort.

One needs to go back to the developments that occurred immediately after independence to discover the roots of this silo working in the defence set-up. An epochal change occurred when the defence member in the Viceroy's Council, namely, the commander-in-chief of the British Indian Army, was dropped from the Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet. He retained his designation as commander-in-chief of the army, but the heads of the navy and air force—earlier subordinate to him—were upgraded to be the commanders-in-chief of their respective forces. A conscious effort was thus made to equate the heads of the three armed forces and attenuate the importance of the commander-in-chief of the army. Changes were also made in the Warrant of Precedence to reduce the salience of the armed forces in the administrative system. For instance,

secretaries to the union government and chief secretaries in the states were equated with the vice-chiefs/area commanders. Earlier, union secretaries and chief secretaries were equated with brigadiers. All this was bitterly resented by the armed forces.

Next, we need to place in perspective the changes that took place in 1955 when the Army, Navy and Air Force Acts came up for review. The appellation commander-in-chief with its imperial connotations was dropped, and the three service acts were amended to re-designate them as Chief of the Army Staff, Chief of the Naval Staff and Chief of the Air Staff respectively. However, a proposal was simultaneously floated by Nehru to establish service councils for the higher management of defence on the pattern of the Army Council in UK in which the chiefs of staff and their principal staff officers are members, and become the chief advisers to the defence minister. This proposal was initially accepted by the service chiefs; later, they changed their minds on learning that this system had been conceived of in Britain to reduce the powers and influence of the Duke of Cambridge, who was a service chief, but also Queen Victoria's brother [*sic*] (cousin).²⁴ Thus, the service chiefs chose to remain outside the Ministry of Defence as the operational and ceremonial heads of their services. Frequent complaints now made by the armed forces that they are not being made part of the higher defence decision-making process are therefore egregious and somewhat overstated.

Efforts to achieve integration and coordination between the three services have been sought through the Chiefs of Staff Committee, with the senior-most chief serving as chairman. This system has proven quite unsatisfactory. For one, the chairman has no fixed tenure; neither has he any overriding voice in the deliberations of the committee. The government is deprived of single-point military advice on matters requiring inter-service coordination. Inter-service prioritization of requirements is not being ensured, and defence planning continues to merely aggregate the individual demands of the three services. The services, too, are unable to achieve 'jointness' to maximize synergy between themselves.²⁵

Consequential recommendations to remedy this situation by having a single person to represent the services, like a Chief of Defence Staff, have not yet succeeded.²⁶ The other suggestion to establish an Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) has been effected, but the jury remains out on the effectiveness of this modality. It is headed by a Chief of IDS (Vice-Chief rank) but functions under the Chiefs of Staff Committee, which has severe limitations. The Group of Ministers, incidentally, which examined the

Kargil Inquiry Committee report, had recommended the establishment of a Chief of Defence Staff. Largely for reasons that lie within the services, this system has not come into existence—the irony is that the Indian Cabinet system has proven unable to execute its own decisions, with the result that a suboptimal administrative system is continuing.

IN RETROSPECT

The foregoing makes abundantly clear that the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962 was triggered by the ill-conceived Forward Policy, invented by Mullik, endorsed by Nehru and enthusiastically promoted by Krishna Menon. There is nothing to suggest any larger consultations being undertaken with the political, civilian and military leadership. Thereafter, the reforms to the Indian higher defence apparatus undertaken were minimal, and quite inadequate to the requirements. Adjudged along the three parameters identified earlier:

1. Civil-military relations remain parlous; a trenchant judgement is possible that civil-military relations in India, since independence, have remained uneasy. Rarely have they been cordial. But after the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962, as also at the present juncture, they have reached their nadir. No institutional efforts were consciously made to improve civil–military relations by effecting inter-postings between the ministry and services headquarters, a proposal that has often been made but never implemented. It seems the Naresh Chandra Committee report, which is classified, has also made this tired old recommendation.
2. Arrangements for assessing intelligence remain suboptimal. The JIC modality had clearly proved less than useful, and it is early days to opine whether the National Security Council will succeed in improving the quality of intelligence assessments. Apropos, national security includes but proceeds beyond defence security to include internal and non-military challenges to the nation's well-being, whereas national defence has a narrower remit to ensure territorial integrity. The National Security Council has several shortcomings, but the chief defect is that the national security adviser wears too many hats. He heads the border negotiations with China and is involved in resolving all manner of foreign policy issues to the detriment of his primary role of assessing the threats to national security.²⁷ Sadly, the most serious threats to

national security arise from militancy and terrorism. Left-wing extremism has repeatedly been identified as the chief threat to India's security by the prime minister. But, three of the four national security advisers have come from the foreign service, with only a nodding acquaintance with internal security issues.

3. The silo manner of working with the departments in the Ministry of Defence, and the services headquarters functioning in independent spaces, has been criticized since independence. Integrating the Ministry of Defence with the services headquarters into a holistic, purposive and effective decision-making body has been a chimerical pursuit. The IDS system, currently being executed, is a half-hearted measure. It has been placed under a Vice-Chief of Staff, functioning under the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee; hence, the IDS cannot reach its full potential unless the Chief of Defence Staff is brought into position. Of this, there is no possibility. The result is Hamlet being enacted without the Prince of Denmark. A segmented and compartmentalized approach to defence decision making continues with predictably suboptimal results in dealing with sensitive issues.

What then were the changes and reforms made after the 1962 disaster? Undoubtedly, the most high profile was the decision to initiate a defence planning process. Apropos, the first defence plan envisaged:

1. building up and maintenance of a well-equipped army with a strength of 825,000 men;
2. maintaining a 45-squadron air force... and improvement of air defence radar and communication facilities;
3. phased programme for replacement of overage ships in the Indian Navy;
4. strengthening the defence production base; and
5. improving the organization base.²⁸

Only slight reflection would inform that the last three goals were only statements of intent. Besides, they are of a continuing nature. The air force could never achieve its planned strength of 45 squadrons, and it is not clear why these squadrons were needed when the air force was not utilized in the Sino-Indian conflict for reasons that were altogether recondite. However, the army quickly leapt in strength from roughly 550,000 to 825,000 in a couple of years; it saddled itself thereafter with a 'bulge' problem²⁹ that afflicted the army for several years. A similar

problem afflicted the air force at the sergeant's level, but was less evident in the navy.

Harold Wilson had famously said that a week is a long time in politics. The Indian higher defence decision-making apparatus has proven that six-and-a-half decades is too short for reform. Some changes were, no doubt, effected, establishing, ironically, that reform in the defence machinery only follows security disasters like 1962 and 1999. Perhaps, a similar disaster is awaited to give a further shove to the project. So much is clear: defence reform will not come incrementally from reluctant civil and military bureaucracies; only visionary political leadership can bring this about.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance received from the IDSA library, especially Mukesh, who cheerfully searched out decades-old books and journals from the stacks.

NOTES

1. These stone-walling tactics include resisting an application made under the Right to Information Act. It was rejected by the defence minister on the grounds that an internal study by the Indian Army had confirmed that the contents of the Henderson Brooks report 'are not only extremely sensitive but are of current operational value'. Vembu, Venkatesan, 'The Ghost of 1962', *Daily News and Analysis*, Mumbai, 2 May 2010.
2. Gopal, Sarvepalli, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, Vol. 3, 1956–1964*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 232.
3. Op. Cit., p. 208.
4. Ibid.
5. Palit, D.K., *War in the High Himalayas: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962*, New Delhi: Lancer International, 1991, pp. 276–7. Palit occupied the pivotal post of Director Military Operations at that time.
6. Sen, L.P., *Slender was the Thread: Kashmir Confrontation 1947–48*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1969, pp. 297–98.
7. Sinha, S.K., *A Soldier Recalls*, New Delhi: Lancer International, 1992, p. 181.
8. Rao, P.V.R., *Defense without Drift*, Bombay: Popular Prakshan, 1970, p. 15. The author was appointed Defence Secretary shortly after the Sino-Indian border conflict ended, and needed to deal with its debris.
9. Maxwell, Neville, 'Henderson Brooks Report: An Introduction', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, Nos 14–15, 14–20 April 2001, pp. 1189–93.

10. This surmise becomes almost certainty on reading Maxwell, Neville, *India's China War*, Bombay: Jaico, 1970. An inquiry into the leakage of sensitive documents relating to the border conflict was conducted by the Ministry of Defence, but its conclusions were never publicized, probably because it would have caused extreme embarrassment to Army Headquarters, the Ministry of Defence and the Government of India.
11. Maxwell, 'Henderson Brooks Report', p. 1190.
12. Kissinger, Henry, *On China*, New York: Allen Lane, 2011, p. 188.
13. Cohen, Stephen P., *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 171.
14. Chari, P.R., 'India: The Policy Process', in James M. Roherty (ed.), *Defense Policy Formation: Towards Comparative Analysis*, Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 1980, pp. 130–1.
15. The files of those times reveal Menon's complex personality. He was rude and abrasive in dealing with the civil and military bureaucracies working under him, but servile in his dealings with Nehru. His tolerance, indeed indulgence, displayed towards Lt Gen B.M. Kaul derived from the latter's closeness to Nehru. Kaul had no operational experience but used his proximity to Nehru for personal aggrandizement. At the end of the day, however, Menon especially, but Nehru undoubtedly, must be held responsible for the disaster in 1962.
16. Mullik, B.M., *The Chinese Betrayal*, Bombay: Allied, 1971, pp. 329–30.
17. At the anecdotal level, it bears mention that deviations from the prevailing orthodoxy were frowned upon, and did prejudice career prospects, which served as a cautionary tale for others. Consequently, detailed analyses by Indian military and foreign service personnel at that time regarding Chinese force increases in Tibet, their dispositions near the Indian border, improvements in the communications networks, suppression of internal dissent and insidious Han-ization of Tibet were brushed aside, and the authors of these analyses reprimanded. Sardar Patel's clairvoyant assessment of the Chinese threat, based on an IB report, was all but forgotten in the euphoria of a new orthodoxy that decried any perception of a threat from China.
18. For that matter, the busy members of the JIC, manning critical posts, rarely found time to attend JIC meetings. Anecdotally, it needs mention that this author, then a Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Defence, was routinely deputed to join the meetings of the JIC during 1971, when almost daily and weekly assessments were being made of the unfolding events in East Pakistan. The same was true of the other primary members of the JIC; it had become a committee of deputies!
19. Ben-Zvi, Abraham, 'Hindsight and Foresight: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Surprise Attacks', *World Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 3, April 1976, p. 387.

20. Chari, P.R., 'Towards a Defense Management Concept', *IDSA Journal*, Vol. 8, October–December 1975 and January–March 1976, citing the *Annual British Defence Statement* (1972), chapter 1, paras 24–6.
21. A similar fate, incidentally, befell the Arun Singh Committee on Defence Expenditure (1990).
22. Anecdotally, one of these worthies just could not get the rank structure right, and had asked whether an Army Captain outranked a Navy Captain, or it was the other way round. He was also given to emphasizing his argument by adding a 'Mister' to the rank; so, he could address a naval officer, for example, as 'Mr Admiral'.
23. Estimates Committee (1992–93), *Defense Force Levels: Manpower, Management and Policy*, Nineteenth Report, New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, (Tenth Lok Sabha) Ministry of Defence, 29 August 1992.
24. Khera, S.S., *India's Defense Problems*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1968, p. 16.
25. These weaknesses are noticed in the recommendations (February 2001) made by the Group of Ministers in the Kargil Review Committee report entitled, *Reforming the National Security System*.
26. Remarkably enough, the Group of Ministers had also recommended the appointment of a Chief of Defence Staff to head the Chiefs of Staff Committee, which finds place in their report, *Reforming the National Security System*. But, the Cabinet continues to evade this issue by seeking to ascertain the views of the political parties, which is an unusual procedure that has been continuing for years.
27. An analysis of the shortcomings of the National Security Council has been attempted in Chari, P.R., 'India's Nuclear Doctrine: Confused Ambitions', *The Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2000, pp. 123–35.
28. Government of India, *Ministry of Defense Annual Report, 1964–65*, New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1965, pp. 1–2.
29. To achieve the sanctioned strength of 825,000, the Indian Army undertook an emergency recruitment of several thousand officers who, in due course, became Majors and eligible for promotion to the rank of Lt. Colonels, at which point the sifting of those deemed unfit for higher command and rank begins. Imagine the problem of choosing officers (at times it became one out of a hundred out of several thousands)—called 'deep' selection—which led to great frustration among those left out of the reckoning who needed to retire at the age of 50 in the infantry and 52 in the technical arms. This problem proved irresolvable, and was only solved when the cohort recruited during the 'bulge' period eventually retired.