

**Building Army's Human Resource for
Sub-Conventional Warfare** by K.C. Dixit, New Delhi:
Pentagon Security International, 2012, pp. 187, INR 695

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The Indian Army today faces a very complex challenge. It is increasingly becoming clear that the kind of wars that were fought a few decades ago are not going to be fought in the future. The nature of warfare is changing from conventional warfare to one that is 'sub-conventional'. Rivalries among nations continue to exist but the spheres of these rivalries now focus on economic capabilities and strengths. As the author has rightly pointed out, economic superiority along with credible deterrence with the capability to undertake sub-conventional operations, in proxy wars, insurgency, and terrorism and border skirmishes, form the basis of power in any region. Armies across the world now have to perform in multiple situations from war to insurgency to terrorism. They need to have human resource capabilities that can deal with the stress of such warfare. The book tries to address these issues within the Indian Army and recommends some steps for the future.

The Indian Army, the nature of its work, and the way it is trained, is geared towards motivating the soldier to protect the nation and her citizens from outside threats. This motivation comes at the cost of family life, long separation from loved ones, living in barracks, possibly in geographical isolation, and in a hostile environment with the stress of being in a state of continuous alertness. However, keeping in mind the changing nature of warfare, the author has very rightly called for a better

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understanding of the nuances of this new warfare. The organization needs to recognize that there is a vast difference between the role of the forces in conventional warfare and in sub-conventional warfare, and the men have to be made aware of this fact as well. The author informs the reader that in conventional warfare the security forces have a clear understanding of their objectives and plans for attaining it. In sub-conventional warfare, the rules of the game are different: it defies the logic, geometric, and technological aspects of conventional war as well as its principles. In addition to this, the political and human aspects of this type of warfare complicate effective response.

This book is a study of the factors that enhance the morale of the troops and motivates them to work better. It also discusses issues of concern as these cause undue stress, creating minor and major problems for the Army. It might not be the first thing that comes to mind when one thinks of the Army, but issues such as property or land disputes at home, apathy of civil authorities, the desire to provide better education to their children, and inadequate income when compared to their peers in civil jobs, among others, can be reasons for stress. It is assumed that soldiers would be able to endure long separation from their families and periodic shifting as a matter of routine; however, these are added burdens compounded by inadequate housing facilities, leaves being cancelled, or delay in travel formalities which lead to wastage of precious leave days or extended tenures. Such issues can cause much anguish among the soldiers and need to be addressed by both the Defence Ministry as well as the civil administration.

The other issues that need attention relate not just to the physical but also the psychological well-being of the soldiers. Stress within the Army is leading to alarming instances of suicides among the jawans and officers. There is an urgent need for better mental health facilities and psychiatrists. The troops trained in conventional warfare experience very high levels of stress in operations characterized as low-intensity warfare, and this tends to erode morale among them. It also has an effect on their functioning, not just as individuals but also in the working of the group as a whole. Social apathy has been identified as the root cause for frustration and the author points to the fact that some suicides can be linked to this apathy. The fear of death or loss of limb is constant in this profession. It would be a great relief to the soldiers if they are convinced that the Army and its welfare organizations, along with their civilian counterparts, would provide their families with every possible support in the event of

their death or alternative employment to them in case of any accidental disability. Another factor that the author highlights is that soldiers retire from service at a relatively younger age as compared to their civilian counterparts; in such a situation to start a new career is a daunting task. Attention has to be paid to the need to absorb soldiers in the various organizations of the government without cut in pay or seniority. Such issues that are probably not underlined in major debates of change within the armed forces, are addressed by the author in very simple language.

The author also points out that for the moment the forces employ the 'doctrine of minimum use of force' as issued by the Army Headquarters. This doctrine calls upon them to use force on terrorists while winning the hearts and minds of the people. What the doctrine is unable to comprehend is that it can be difficult for a soldier belonging to a different cultural milieu, functioning in a hostile environment where he is viewed as an outsider by the local population and with very little support from the civil authorities, to judge the difference between the two. He is also aware of the fact that if he kills a civilian or a terrorist while defending himself, he would perhaps be faced by unfriendly media barrage and a human rights inquiry. What he cannot understand is why the media or human rights are not considered an important issue when his fellow soldiers are killed in encounters with the adversary. These uncertainties add to the stress that the soldier faces as part of his profession. The author recommends that the Army should interact with the media and make them aware of their stance as well as make the soldier sound on legalities of such matters. The Army should also be open to acknowledge and punish transgressions, if any, committed by the troops.

The author addresses the need for better training to handle problems related to counter-insurgency operations, and the need for communication between senior officers and their juniors, and between jawans and officers. Lack of communication can be a major hindrance not just in the success of an operation but in the working of the unit as well. In the hostile and isolated environments that soldiers work in, it is essential to forge bonds of trust and understanding between themselves. This would also help relieve the stress from which they suffer.

It is to lay emphasis on such issues that the author has called for a re-organization of the training system of the armed forces. He has not confined his study to just the way the soldiers are trained for both types of warfare but extends it to the criteria for recruitment itself. The attention given to the physical test, according to the author, is disqualifying men

who could be of great value to the Army in the future. Physical attributes can be developed through training; however, mental attributes cannot. In the future, wars will be knowledge wars, and the Army will have to attract qualified and educated people. This, in turn, calls for a change in the force structure and organization.

The author has done commendable work in bringing to light all aspects that affect the lives of the Indian soldiers. He has not confined himself just to the professional front, but has dealt with matters related to their daily well-being, such as food and sanitary needs. He has also studied personal issues that concern them. Being an officer himself, he has special insight into the working of not just the system but also the mind of the soldiers, and has been able to bring forth that in the book in a language devoid of jargon, both academic or military. However, the book does repeat information and tighter editing would have enhanced the reading experience while ridding it of minor typographical errors.

The book is meant for a niche audience and would appeal to those who are in the armed forces as well as those researching the issues raised by the author. It is hoped that it would be read by decision-makers and top-ranking officers of the Army so that they are better able to identify the problems being faced by the troops and work on possible solutions.