

Cooperation in Military Training as a Tool of Peacetime Military Diplomacy

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Abstract

Military diplomacy has long been one of the essential constituents of international diplomacy and an effective methodology, to foster bilateral and regional relationships. Military training cooperation is an essential component of military diplomacy and helps to build close ties with other nations. Such cooperation also helps to strengthen strategic security relationships and address common security concerns. The Indian armed forces have rich expertise of operating in varied terrain, as also live combat experience in a vast spectrum of operations. This potential can therefore, be utilised to partake in training activities with other countries, to build close military ties and healthy, mutually beneficial bilateral relations. The paper looks at the manner of conduct of military training cooperation by India and examines the areas where this cooperation can be suitably enhanced by adopting a more concerted approach to peacetime military diplomacy, in consonance with foreign policy.

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Introduction

Diplomacy can be called the art or practice of conducting international relations. The role of military diplomacy manifests itself in its two basic components: preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy.¹ Within the framework of preventive diplomacy, the military component is aimed to achieve the climate of confidence, necessary for the improvement of relations between two nations. This can be called *peacetime military diplomacy*. The best approach to the prevention of confrontation between two countries is to identify of common interests and to widen cooperation between them in diverse fields, particularly ‘military’. Depending upon the nature of relations between the states, the interests, peacetime military diplomacy has to find the best rhythm

for the development of military relations.

Coercive diplomacy can be brought into play when all the components of preventive diplomacy are exhausted.¹ It shades the spectrum between diplomacy and war. The success of coercive diplomacy lies in the exploitation of the potential of the capability rather than its actual use.² Military power is the key element of coercive diplomacy. Adopting an aggressive military posture, conduct of missile tests, display of air power, posturing of naval fleets and even limited military intervention are some of the ways to carry out coercive military diplomacy.

Peacetime Military Diplomacy

Peacetime military diplomacy is an important constituent of the five basic channels of nation-to-nation contact between friendly governments, i.e., political, diplomatic, economic, cultural/social, and last but not the least, military. As a component of foreign policy, it aims to bring in greater transparency and confidence in the military sphere and contribute towards closer relations with countries through constructive use of defence resources in times of peace. It also serves as a means of conveying a nation's security concerns and perceptions and creation of a favourable security environment.

While it is true that diplomacy is the first line of defence and defence is the last, it can be reasoned that in between, one can have military diplomacy, whereby the military is seen as an additional channel and avenue by which conflicts could be averted, if not resolved.³ Rather than viewing diplomacy and force as opposing ends of the spectrum of national policy—where one is used when the other fails—it is important to recognise that each must seamlessly support the other. This entails striking the right balance between foreign policy and security interests and strengthening military relations through foreign policy tools like military training programmes, arms transfers, security dialogues and confidence-building measures. These efforts pay off, with stronger security relationships with other countries.⁴ Military diplomacy does not in any way develop outside the diplomacy of the state and the scope and scale of military relations are influenced by the tenor of overall relations. The government spells out the broad parameters of foreign policy and military diplomacy is an essential component of this policy.

India has an abiding stake in peace and stability in its neighbourhood for its long-term security and projection on the regional and eventually the world scene. One of the objectives of India's foreign policy is the intensification and

consolidation of ties with the neighbours and strengthening of peace and security in the region as a whole, through mutually beneficial cooperation.⁵ Peacetime military diplomacy can help to build the foundation for regional cooperation, which is based on mutual trust and confidence. Upgrading military ties, by looking at various alternatives of peacetime military diplomacy in a sustained manner, can reduce the security concerns in the region and assist in the fulfilment of the foreign policy objectives. International Military Training Cooperation (IMTC) is an essential component of peacetime military diplomacy and can prove vital in furthering India's strategic interests.

British and Chinese Peacetime Military Diplomacy: A Brief Overview

Peacetime military diplomacy has been recognised as an instrument of state policy by a number of countries. Britain and China are two countries that have institutionalised peacetime military diplomacy and are conducting it in a coordinated and sustained manner. The establishment of military diplomacy as a defence mission by Britain has provided better coherence and renewed impetus to peacetime activities by its armed forces. China has been active in developing an omni-directional and multi-level form of military diplomacy.⁶ Chinese armed forces have been active in participating in multilateral military diplomatic activities to bring the positive role of the Chinese armed forces into full play in the sphere of international military affairs.

Britain

In recognition of the changed post-Cold War strategic environment, Britain carried out a strategic defence review (SDR) in 1998. It provided a reassessment of Britain's security interests and defence needs, and considered how the roles, missions and capabilities of its Armed Forces could be adjusted to meet these new realities. The SDR concluded that the Armed Forces should not only defend Britain and its interests, but also be 'a force for good in the world' and help prevent and contain crises. The SDR acknowledges conflict prevention and peacetime diplomacy as core defence activities. A new defence mission of 'Military Diplomacy' was created (Eighth Defence Mission).⁷ The Mission was defined as follows:-

"To provide forces to meet the varied activities undertaken by the Ministry of Defence to dispel hostility, build and maintain trust and assist in the development of democratically accountable armed forces, thereby making a significant contribution to conflict prevention and resolution"

Three specific Military Tasks (MT) underpin, and contribute directly to this Mission: *MT 16*—arms control, non-proliferation, and confidence and security building measures; *MT 17*—outreach activities designed to contribute to security and stability in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly Russia, but also extending to the Trans-Caucasus and Central Asia, through bilateral assistance and co-operation programmes; and *MT 18*—military training cooperation with foreign military forces.⁷ The aim of creating this Mission was to ensure that military diplomacy was more focused and suitably linked to Britain's wider security and foreign policy objectives. This was met by integrating the Ministry of Defence's activities very closely, with those of other government departments, particularly the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development.

Drawing from the above, peacetime military diplomacy in the Indian context can be defined as under: -

“In keeping with foreign policy and security objectives, establish, build and maintain military-to-military contacts with other countries so as to contribute to strengthening of relations and enhancing peace and security.”

China

Presently, in China, the foreign military relations programme of the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) is strictly a matter of 'realpolitik', as Beijing expands its interactions with the international community. It serves as an important adjunct to Beijing's global diplomacy and is an integral part of China's national defence policy.⁸ In pursuance of this purpose, the PLA is actively engaged in external contacts and exchanges, in a flexible and practical manner, and is making sustained efforts for enhanced mutual trust, friendship and cooperation with the armed forces of other countries. The world's largest army is now practicing military diplomacy as an integral part of its overall diplomacy and has taken advantage of the reforms and liberalisation for a new look.⁹ The PLA has taken up military diplomacy in a big way to dispel 'fears' among neighbours and other countries alike that Beijing is a threat to them. This however has not succeeded as some of the countries in China's neighbourhood still consider it a threat.

Over the past two decades, the PLA's role has increased considerably and is likely to become even more significant in the future, as China develops its military capabilities and projects a larger international profile.¹⁰ PLA's foreign relations programme has several goals: to shape the international security

environment in support of key Chinese national security objectives, to improve political and military relations with other countries, to enhance China's military modernisation and to acquire knowledge in modern military doctrine, operations, training, military medicine, administration, and a host of non-combat-related areas.¹⁰

Beijing's larger geo-political strategy of dominating South Asia is manifested through extensive military assistance to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.¹¹ China has sought to gain strategic advantage over India by progressively making India's neighbours dependent on China to a large extent for their defence supplies. A large proportion of military equipment of Bangladesh and Myanmar is of Chinese origin, thus resulting in increasing dependence of these countries on China, for spares/replacement and training. This indicates that military diplomacy is being pursued by China to destabilise the region in pursuit of its larger interests, mainly strategic containment of India. In stark contrast, the thrust of India's peacetime military diplomacy is limited to providing military assistance to improve the training standards of the armed forces of other countries or to help them deal with internal security problems. This needs to be enhanced to give India greater leverage in the region as also in the international arena.

Peacetime Military Diplomacy through IMTC

IMTC, both bilateral and multinational, is an important constituent of peacetime military diplomacy and a significant instrument to further national strategic interests. All defence forces provide training in preparation for employment in the assigned role and tasks thereof. The training encompasses pre-induction or entry training and advanced professional training in various fields. While this training is carried out internally, it can also be conducted by involving foreign participation, both bilateral and multinational. IMTC covers a wide range of training activities including conducting courses, providing training teams and military training advisers to other countries, organising multinational conferences and seminars to enhance mutual understanding, conducting bilateral and multinational army, air and naval exercises, joint adventure training activities and sports. Such cooperation helps to build strategic security relationships with countries and address common security concerns. Common threats, especially those related to international terrorism, can be better handled through joint training and operations. The synergy and enhanced fighting potential so achieved can ensure timely and coordinated response in a crisis situation.

US Approach to IMTC

The US military strategy has prescribed a bigger global role for the armed forces, in its foreign policy. Both the scope and goals of military activity have increased after the end of the Cold War, with the aim of ‘filling security vacuums’ and enlarging the US-friendly, stable space in the world. Under the rubric of ‘environment shaping’, there has been an expansion in the range of military assistance programmes, multinational exercises, military-to-military contacts, and other forms of military diplomacy.¹² In addressing the challenges facing the US, the State and Defense Departments work together to identify where US interests lie, in order to ensure that policies and planning processes are consistently connected. Nowhere has this been more apparent, than in the area of security assistance. Security assistance is a national programmes administered by the State Department in conjunction with the White House, the Congress, and the Treasury Department. The programmes are executed by the Department of Defence.¹³ The geographic commanders-in-chief (C-in-Cs), working within the policy guidelines set in Washington and collaborating with US ambassadors and country teams within their areas of responsibility, tailor programmes and activities to meet changing local and regional requirements.¹⁴ Through the C-in-Cs, the United States conducts peacetime engagement activities with nations around the world—building stronger military relationships with allies and friends in the process.¹⁵ This is peculiar only to the US due to its global reach.

One of the important components of security assistance is military training. Over the past decade, one of the principal means by which the US has interacted with almost all governments in the world is by training their military forces. The United States has a pro-active approach to military diplomacy wherein training teams are dispatched in those regions where it has significant strategic interests.¹⁶ The US military offers over 2,000 courses, covering combat skills, military management, civil-military relations and use of US weapon systems.¹⁷ One of the key programs under which training is provided is the *International Military Education and Training (IMET)* programmes. This programme has proved beneficial in furthering US national security interests and in fostering better relationships. In some cases this is the only military or diplomatic tool the US can use, to engage certain countries.¹⁸ During FY 2002-03, the US allocated \$65 million to the IMET programmes.¹⁸ It facilitates foreign military students to study in the US thus enhancing their military professionalism along Western lines and strengthening their own training capabilities. As a corollary, the

Programme provides the US, access to, and influence with, foreign military and defence leaders. The US has provided \$17 million to Nepal in 2003 for training of the Royal Nepal Army.¹⁹ Joint training programmes have proved to be force multipliers that pay off with stronger security relationships with allies and other countries—which in turn have proven critical in international responses to conflicts such as in Kosovo.²⁰ The IMET programme is considered as perhaps ‘the most cost-effective security assistance programme’.²¹

The US conducts military training not just to win friends, but also to push their political agenda in other states. A seat in a US military college is a ‘coveted mark’ of the world’s lone superpower’s favours. Offering berths to officers of the developing countries provides the US unrivalled ability to influence the officer cadre of their armed forces.²² Military training is sometimes also justified as a reward for political support, as provided by the US to the tiny Pacific island state of Tuvalu. (Tuvalu was one of the only four countries, which joined the US and Israel in voting against the October 2000 UN Resolution condemning Israel for its indiscriminate use of force in Palestine).²³ Training cooperation activities also provide direct benefits to US service personnel. In fact, a number of these programmes are conducted for their benefit. Whenever US servicemen meet with their foreign counterparts, they improve their understanding of the counterparts’ military organisations, language, culture, and political system. They also improve their understanding of the global environment into which they might deploy in the future—whether in combat, or as part of the regular forward presence. Familiarity with foreign environments is vastly improved when the training cooperation activities are conducted in the regions rather than in the US.²⁴

Indian Military Training Cooperation

The Indian Armed Forces have the experience of operating over varied terrain, which is possibly unique in the world. The Indian Army has some of the finest training facilities in jungle, snow and desert warfare. The operational deployment and sustainability range from mountains and glaciers in the North, to the deserts of Rajasthan, and from the jungles of the North-East to the marine environment of the Island territories. They have continuing operational experience in the entire spectrum of conflict, from operations other than war, to low-intensity conflict and conventional war fighting.²⁵ The forces have a rich tradition of highly professional training, supported by state-of-the-art training facilities, constantly updated and refined through live combat experience. The vast expertise can therefore be utilised to impart meaningful training to

the defence forces of countries in the regions of interest, as also to conduct joint training, to build up close military ties and healthy, mutually beneficial bilateral relations. Military training cooperation can therefore be made a focal point of India's peacetime military diplomacy.

It is however necessary to draw out essential parameters within which IMTC will need to be used by India. A careful cost-benefit security/strategic analysis will have to be done prior to providing training assistance to specific countries, as resources are scarce. For this be the countries are to be prioritised, in consultations with the MEA, for developing, maintaining and fostering military training cooperation. Protecting sensitive technologies and information will be of prime importance during joint training and exercises. It will also be imperative to ensure safety of own troops provided as part of training teams with other countries.

Training Courses with Foreign Armed Forces

Professional courses with foreign armed forces, especially advanced countries like the US, offer an excellent opportunity to acquire specialised skills for any country for its armed forces which would help in enhancing their own training standards. Participation in such courses also enables the participants to interact with counterparts from other countries and build long-term relationships, which can be beneficial to all the participating services. So, it is essential to avail of courses being offered by other countries, irrespective of the size and status of the country offering the course, to have a more visible presence at different levels in the foreign military training establishments. This will also help to establish long lasting ties, with future military leaders of the countries in the areas of interest. It is for this reason that India sends officers to attend courses in smaller countries like Bangladesh. India welcomed the Chinese invitation to send officers to attend courses at the National Defence University in Beijing. Three officers—one each from the Army, Navy and the Air Force are attending a one-year course there, which began in September 2002.²⁶ It will be in India's interest if more officers are sent to attend professional courses in the training institutions of the PLA.

Training Courses in India

Military training is India's forte and it is essential to take advantage of this strength to harness the goodwill of the younger military generation of other countries in the regions of interest and to establish strategic relationship with them. Towards this end, India is imparting military training to the personnel

of friendly foreign countries, under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and Special Aid Programmes (for Bhutan and Sri Lanka) of the MEA, Special Aid Programme (for Nepal) of the Ministry of Defence and under bilateral reciprocal schemes.²⁷ During 2002-03, as many as 128 foreign military personnel were trained under ITEC through long and short-term courses in the training institutions of the three services.²⁸

The MEA allocates funds for training of foreign military personnel of many countries, and course allocation in the training institutions of the three services is based on availability of this fund. But, is not adequate for the desired level of military-to-military cooperation and needs to be substantially enhanced. India should aim to have military officers of nearly all South-Asian countries in its training courses, even if it means doubling the intake into some of the courses.²⁹ Training assistance provided to countries in South-East Asia should also be vastly increased. This would lead to greater reliance of these countries on India for specialised training and reduction of the influence and hold of countries like China. Till the time India's National Defence University is set up, personnel from Chinese Armed Forces can be offered courses at the Indian National Defence College at New Delhi and Defence Services Staff College at Wellington.

India needs to utilise the expertise gained in UN peacekeeping operations by imparting training to other countries in various facets of peacekeeping. A large pool of personnel who have participated in these operations, are available as instructors. Their experience and feedback after each mission helps in updating the training content and methodologies at the Peacekeeping Training Centre in Delhi. With the proven de-mining capability and vast experience in dealing with Improvised Explosive Devices and disposal of unexploded ordinance, the Indian Army can impart practical training to the personnel of friendly countries.

The former Soviet Union/Russia has been the major supplier of defence equipment to India and India has always been the model for developing countries in maximising the utility of the Soviet designed weapons and technology that the designers in turn, further improved them. Over a period of time, India has built up the necessary infrastructure and expertise to handle this equipment and also service it. It can therefore, offer to train the crew and technicians of countries in the region who are holding Soviet or Russian equipment (The training of Malaysian MIG 29 aircraft pilots and ground support staff by India is a suitable example in this context).³⁰

The training requirements of the Indian Navy are varied and multi-dimensional. This has necessitated the establishment of a number of basic and specialised training academies and institutions throughout the country. It would be beneficial to train foreign naval personnel in specialised areas such as submarine warfare and helicopter operations. The hydrographic capability of the Indian Navy is today the fourth largest in the world. The Indian Naval Hydrographic Department possesses vast experience with a longstanding tradition of professionalism, state-of-the-art equipment, modern infrastructure and trained personnel. The Indian Naval Hydrographic Centre can organise and conduct training programmes on a regular basis for naval officers of the Indian Ocean littoral countries. This would enable those countries to establish hydrographic departments for their navies if they do not have them already, and also participate in the survey large areas of the seabed in a joint and coordinated manner.³¹

The aspect of English language training, before imparting professional training to students of those countries where English is not commonly used, has to be taken into account. It is advantageous to have the training syllabus for officers in the services in English language as it is used in several countries. It may be desirable to design courses wherein English language and IT application are first imparted first, followed by the requisite training in the appropriate fields/specialisation at the training institutes in India.

Workshops/Seminars/Conferences

A number of countries regularly hold important workshops/seminars/conferences on regional security and current issues of importance. Participation in these seminars exposes the participants to the perspectives of various participating nations, on the existing security environment and current trends. Such events can facilitate interaction among regional militaries and serve as non-political fora for senior military officers to meet and discuss professional military subjects on a non-attribution basis.³² They also provide opportunities to voice opinions and make others see India's viewpoint, on important global and regional issues. The College of Defence Management, Secunderabad invited for the first time, representatives from friendly countries to attend its annual seminar in January 2003 with the focus on 'National Security'.³³ India needs to become the regional hub for strategic thinking thought and organise defence seminars on a regular basis, inviting service officers from the world over.

Indian Military Training Teams in Other Countries

India has been sending training teams to a number of developing countries to impart military training to their personnel and has also cooperated with these countries to assist them in establishing training institutions on the Indian model. India has very strong ties with Africa. After independence it became the voice of the colonised countries and showed the way in the opposition to Apartheid. It has also been training the armed forces of a number of African countries. It now finds Africa a source for its growing oil and gas needs and so increased cooperation will be still more important. In addition, efforts India needs to make to locate our training teams in the neighbouring countries like Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to decrease their dependence on countries like China and the US.

Joint Training Exercises

Combined exercises between defence forces facilitate interoperability and conduct of joint military operations against a common threat. They provide insight into each other's leadership techniques, battle drills and standard operating procedures. By training together in peacetime, confusion and delays are prevented and joint operations made smooth and effective. Confidence levels, professional trust and respect are built up through joint exercises. Moreover, such exercises convey signals to potential adversaries and challengers of authority, about the joint military response their actions could invite.

Joint Naval Exercises (JNE) JNE also assume immense importance in promoting bilateral/multilateral cooperation. They are conducted in international waters, away from the public gaze, where sensitive issues such as violation of sovereignty, etc., assume little importance. JNE help to dispel concern over India's naval build-up programme and expansion of power projection capabilities. Such concerns were made known to India from the mid-1980s by some littoral states of the Indian Ocean, including Australia.³⁴ The interactions provided by the exercises both at sea and port create transparency regarding the activities and responsibilities of the Indian Navy. JNE are perceived to help instil, as well as build upon, a military dimension to bilateral political relationships as well as signify India's interest in peace and stability in the Indian Ocean.³⁵

Performance in the company of foreign navies enhances the professional reputation of the Indian Navy. Joint exercises with advanced navies such as US, France and UK, are beneficial in enhancing operational effectiveness,

interoperability and identifying areas for modernisation. However, it is also important to lay equal stress on bilateral and multilateral exercises with the navies of the region. This would enable the regional navies to gain professionally as India looks to gain from advanced navies. Towards this, the Indian Navy has been conducting in the Andaman Islands an exercise called *Milan*, biannually Since 1995 which is aimed at cementing ties with neighbours. Naval ships of the regional navies have participated in this exercise at Port Blair.³⁶ The objective of *Milan* is to look at the common problems at sea—pollution, piracy, search and rescue operations as also to strengthen bonds between the navies. This needs to continue for the protection of mutual security interests. This would also stem extra-regional influences and manipulations. There is also a requirement to hold bilateral exercises with the smaller naval powers in the region like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

India and Iran carried out JNE in March 2003 off the Mumbai port. This was a development with geo-political significance, given India's aspirations for strategic relevance from the Gulf of Hormuz to the Straits of Malacca and in view of Chinese assistance in the construction of the Gwadar Port on Pakistan's western coast. This could be the beginning of a relationship which could give India a strategic toehold in the Persian Gulf, the key to the world's energy security.³⁷ The Russian and Indian Navies conducted their biggest-ever exercises in the Arabian Sea in May 2003. This was the first operational engagement between the two navies.³⁸ This will play a significant role in strengthening co-operation, trust and mutual understanding between the two naval powers. JNE with China will bring in greater transparency and help to strengthen relations following high-level political visits from both sides.

Indo-US Military Training Cooperation

The US is paying particular attention to building a close relationship with India, commensurate with its emerging power status. The bilateral military and security cooperation is redefining US-India bonds.³⁹ The US military co-operation with India can be viewed as a desirable strategic necessity, in terms of India's long-range national security requirements and interests. Both countries have embarked on joint exercises for humanitarian airlift, special operations training and small unit group exercises between US Marines and Indian forces. These exercises enhance the ability of US forces to integrate with Indian armed forces (with non-NATO standard equipment) into a broad spectrum of operations, promote bilateral cooperation and goodwill between both the services.⁴⁰

The US core interests are high altitude warfare and counter insurgency skills. A 50-member US Army contingent underwent training at Counter-Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School (CIJWS), Vairangte in Mizoram in July 2001.⁴¹ This was however, commented upon adversely in the media on the assumption that India was offering bases to the US. India can offer its expertise in high altitude warfare and counter-insurgency and enhance the level of training for the US forces. The forthcoming joint training exercises in Ladakh are a step in this direction.

Advantages of Military Training Cooperation by India

Military training cooperation by India has contributed to building bridges of friendship with regional countries and it needs to be enhanced further. This cooperation also enriches the Services' cadres by widening horizons and vistas and add substance and stature to India's military capabilities, potential and status. It also assists in acquisition and enhancement of frontier and contemporary technologies, some of which have applications beyond the military field.

Building Bridges with Regional Countries

Military training cooperation has played a significant role in building strong ties by India with the countries in the neighbourhood and extended neighbourhood. The fact that the Indian Army is training the Royal Nepalese Army, to help it tackle the Maoist insurgents is a positive factor in Indo-Nepal relations.⁴² It is in India's interest to provide military assistance to the neighbouring countries against internal disorders so as to prevent outside forces from moving into the region. There is a proposal for India to participate in the training of the Afghan army. This was discussed during the visit of the Afghan Defence Minister, General Mohammad Qasim Fahim in May 2002.⁴³ The Indian Army and the Air Force have played a crucial role in the training of the Afghan forces before the collapse of the Najibullah regime.⁴⁴ Like Afghanistan, the Indian Army is composed of many ethnic and religious groups, and possesses expertise in fighting in high altitude terrain. It was added to the stature of India if it has a physical military presence in Afghanistan.

India has established a military facility in Farkhor, Tajikistan, to train Tajik defence personnel and service military equipment of Soviet and Russian origin.⁴⁵ An Indian military delegation is expected to visit Dushanbe soon to firm up plans for a joint military exercise, the first of such war games by Indian troops in Central Asia.⁴⁶ The move is in keeping with New Delhi's initiative to forge

stronger ties with the region. This is also a signal of cooperation between the two countries in the war on terrorism and a role for India in the race for access to oil and gas-rich Central Asia. The resumption of military-to-military ties with China, is part of the process to normalise bilateral military ties which plays a significant role in the overall improvement in Sino-Indian relations. This has been advanced with the recent visit of the Indian Prime Minister and the Defence Minister to China. India can offer to train the PLA personnel in its training institutions and also participate in joint exercises with China to bring in greater transparency in the military sphere.

The Indian Director-General of Military Training along with representatives from all the three services visited Myanmar in December 2001, to look at the provision of military training and identify areas in which the defence forces could provide assistance.⁴⁷ This reflected increasing military cooperation between the two countries with training being an important component. India can improve its relations with Myanmar through military assistance to counter the undue Chinese influence there and ensure peace and tranquility along the border between the two countries.

Joint military adventure training activities with the neighbouring countries is a recent endeavour in promoting bilateral relations. In a unique show of comradeship, Indian and Bangladeshi Army personnel jointly conducted a rafting expedition in the Ganga River in November 2002.⁴⁸ As part of the Everest Golden Jubilee Celebrations, a joint expedition was undertaken by the Royal Nepal Army and the Indian Army during March-June 2003. A number of mountaineers from the two countries have scaled Mount Everest in May this year.⁴⁹ There is a lot of scope for joint military adventure training activities like hot air ballooning, paragliding, and windsurfing etc., with the neighbouring countries, to build stronger military-to-military ties.

Benefits to the Armed Forces

To sum up, participation by the defence forces in training activities with other nations has a number of direct payoffs. Professional knowledge and skills are updated and it provides a benchmark to ascertain training standards, with respect to other countries. It also gives an insight into the available technology in a particular field, for modernisation of the defence forces. IMTC helps to project the image, professional ethos, capabilities and strengths of the defence forces internationally. It also assists in developing and maintaining contacts with the defence forces of other countries, at the organisational and

personal levels. It also creates an understanding pool of cadre in the services of the target nations, while countering perceptions advanced by countries that are inimical. Through joint training, interoperability can be practised for conduct of combined operations, against a common enemy and for participation in multinational UN peacekeeping operations.

Conclusion

History reveals that wars have been fought amongst states that have closed all communication channels, with no military-to-military contacts. It is important to develop close ties with the military forces of the region, to build confidence and enhance security. The mindset that ‘the pursuit of foreign policy/diplomacy is the exclusive preserve of the diplomats and the use of force that of the military,’ is no longer valid. There cannot be a foreign policy without military content. Therefore, within the overall framework of the Constitution and civilian control, the Indian armed forces will continue to make a contribution to the evolution and formulation of India’s foreign policy.⁵⁰ Peacetime military diplomacy needs to be developed as one of the main and continuous peacetime activities in support of foreign and security policy objectives aimed to maintain peace, establish mutual trust, develop cooperation and enhance stability and security in the region. The formation of Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), as also start of the integration of the Service Headquarters with the Ministry of Defence, although nascent, are a good beginning for an effective and focused approach to military diplomacy. This will also lead to better projection and understanding with the Ministry of External Affairs and other ministries.

IMTC is a vital aspect of peacetime military diplomacy and would go a long way in establishing close ties between nations and healthy, mutually beneficial bilateral relations. Participation by the defence forces in training activities with other nations assists in projecting the image, professional ethos, capabilities and strengths of the defence forces internationally. Professional military interaction creates the linkages which help to build a climate of common understanding in the international environment to face challenges together. Such cooperation does not amount to a military alliance or military and political subservience. It does, however, lay the foundations for a contingency of military inter-operability between two nations. Indian armed forces, on account of their vast expertise of operating in varied terrain as also live combat experience should, therefore, elevate the scale of IMTC by adopting a more concerted approach to peacetime military diplomacy, in consonance with the foreign policy and the laid down parameters.

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