

# NATIONAL SECURITY MECHANISM AND THE HDO

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Those who value the traditional definition of the Higher Defence Organisation (HDO) would affirm that the National Security Council (NSC), Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA), Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) and Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) which oversee the National Security Mechanism (NSM) in their own ways, cannot be considered a part of the HDO. The reason for this affirmation stems from the belief that the conventional idea of 'security' meant the security of territorial integrity from external aggression. But this view has been increasingly challenged in the recent past by the contemporary outlook that internal stability and order also contribute towards the comprehensive national strength of a country and are, hence, equally important factors in protecting and maintaining the security of the nation-state.

Consequently there have been demands for a holistic approach to security rather than treating internal and external threats in water-tight compartments. The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) recommended that the members of the NSC, the senior bureaucracy servicing it and the Service Chiefs need to be continually sensitised to assessed intelligence pertaining to national, regional and international issues through periodic intelligence briefings of the CCS, with all supporting staff in attendance. A closer look

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at the statement would reveal the significance of a relationship that ought to exist among the three apex decision-making bodies on national security namely the CCS, NSC and the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). A few occurrences in the recent past would add credence to the issue.

- Among the many measures that were initiated in response to the Mumbai terrorist attack on 26/11, the Indian government had set up a high level committee under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary to review the measures taken for coastal security at regular intervals<sup>1</sup>. Headed by the Cabinet Secretary, the committee included the Chief of the Naval Staff, Secretaries of all concerned Ministries such as Defence, Home and Petroleum besides the Chief Secretaries of coastal states. Setting up of a Joint Operation Centre for the conduct of joint exercises involving the Navy, Coast Guard and Coastal Police, and improved information sharing were the objectives. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has approved dry leasing of twin-engine helicopters and aircraft for the Coast Guard for air surveillance in addition to the 80 fast interceptor craft being procured by the Indian Navy to supplement the efforts of other coastal security agencies.
- An ambitious proposal which was put forth by the Union Home Ministry in February 2000 to set up a National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) by pooling data from nearly a dozen law enforcement and intelligence agencies was rejected by the CCS<sup>2</sup>. Apparently, the CCS wasn't satisfied with the safety mechanisms meant to uphold the privacy of citizens and wanted to establish a "foolproof" intelligence network. When approved by the CCS, agencies such as the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), Intelligence Bureau (IB), Enforcement Directorate (ED), National Investigation Agency (NIA), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) and Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) would have access to the consolidated data, as and when needed.
- There has been a series of CCS meetings in the last few months to discuss the possible role of the armed forces in anti-Naxal operations.

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1. *Frontier India*, June 18, 2009.

2. Vinay Kumar, "'Big Brother' Fears Stall Chidambaram Data Plan," *The Hindu*, February 14, 2010.

Among the key issues facing the government are the clearing out of mines in the Naxal-affected regions and the use of helicopters to evacuate casualties during Naxal attacks, use of the armed forces in supporting roles and resolving the issue of Command and Control (C2) where the state and Central forces are deployed together.

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The events quoted above reiterate the contemporary concept of national security which presupposes that many foreign and domestic political, economic and military issues are intertwined and each has implications on the other. India has always been a victim of political insurgencies (particularly in the border states) and Pakistan sponsored extremist attacks in various corners of the country, which have adversely affected the country's economic and technological progress. Even today, the principal security threat for India remains the threat to internal security. India has to deal with the challenge of internal security while ensuring that this does not undermine its capacity for effective external defence and this has been a tough balancing act. Commenting on the economic aspect, Ashley Tellis has said, "Preserving internal security became extremely expensive and has now come at the cost of being able to acquire the new technologies required to raise a modern military force"<sup>3</sup>. An analysis by the India Defence Consultants (IDC) concluded, "We have to get our huge Homeland security machinery i.e. the Home Ministry's million strong paramilitary forces linked to the Army as soon as possible, in what is called 'Command and Control' or we will soon have a Frankenstein monster on hand—a bigger and well equipped paramilitary force doing precious little operationally"<sup>4</sup>. This may be an extreme opinion which is contestable but events in the recent past, particularly the Naxal problem, have made it imperative that greater

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3. Ashley Tellis, *India Today Conclave*, New Delhi, March 13, 2004.

4. Homeland Security in India, *An IDC Analysis*, New Delhi, September 7, 2006.

coordination between the conventional HDO and other NSM structures be forged.

It is understandable that the NSC (which plays a vital strategic role on security matters), the CCS (which is the highest political authority on security issues) and the NCA (which controls the development, deployment and use of strategic weapons), have specific objectives to be achieved but there is certainly a case for more horizontal interface amongst these bodies. In order to identify the commonalities of purpose and the possible linkages, the roles and responsibilities of these organisations are to be analysed.

### **THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL**

Considering that India was born in the midst of communal strife and its territorial integrity was challenged within a weeks of its independence, one would have expected a National Security Council to have been established long ago. Possibly, the establishment of a responsive HDO and preoccupation of the political leadership with other social and political issues deprived the country of this development. It is also possible that Nehru's philosophy of security management contributed to the inaction. It was only in the Eighties that sporadic demands for establishment of a coordinated policy-making body on security issues surfaced. It was under Shri V.P. Singh as Prime Minister that a tentative beginning was made to revamp the NSM. However, the exercise remained a non-starter and subsequent attempts by the Narsimha Rao government to establish an NSC were also resisted by some political leaders, ill-advised by the civil bureaucracy.

The emergence of India as a nuclear power and its anticipated transformation into a major power of the region led Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in 1998 to set up a special Task Force headed by Shri K.C. Pant to review the NSM. Shri Jaswant Singh and Air Cmde Jasjit Singh (Retd), were the members. After examining the recommendation of the Task Force, the government set up a revamped NSM on November 19, 1998. The Cabinet Secretariat resolution which notified the creation of the NSC stated<sup>5</sup>:

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5. Cabinet Secretariat Resolution No.281/29.6.98/TS dated April 16, 1999.

The Central Government recognises that national security management requires integrated thinking and coordinated application of the political, military, diplomatic, scientific and technological resources of the state to project and promote national security goals and objectives. National security, in the context of the nation, needs to be viewed not only in military terms but also in terms of internal security, economic security, technological strength and foreign policy. The role of the council is to advise the Central Government on the said matters.

The salient features of the NSC, with an extensive mandate to address the security issues holistically, remain:

- To address the political, economic, energy and strategic security concerns of India.
- The six-member NSC, headed by the Prime Minister, has the Home Minister, Defence Minister, External Affairs Minister, Finance Minister and Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, as members, besides the National Security Adviser (NSA). Other Ministers and officials are invited to attend as required.
- The NSA is to oversee the functioning of the new mechanism and act as primary adviser to the Prime Minister, the Indian Cabinet and the NSC on internal and international security issues. The directors of R&AW and IB technically report to the NSA rather than the Prime Minister directly. He is expected to receive all intelligence reports and coordinate them before presenting before the Prime Minister.
- A National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), consisting of persons of eminence outside the government, with expertise in defence, internal security, strategic analysis, foreign affairs, economics, science and technology. The board is meant to provide a long-term prognosis and analysis to the NSC besides recommending solutions on policy issues referred to it.
- A 17-member Strategic Policy Group (SPG) headed by the Cabinet Secretary and comprising the Chiefs of Staff, Secretaries of key ministries, and the chiefs of the intelligence agencies has been set up to provide

policy options for consideration by the NSC. The SPG consists of the following members:

- Cabinet Secretary.
  - Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy and Air Force.
  - Director of the Intelligence Bureau.
  - Foreign Secretary.
  - Home Secretary.
  - Defence Secretary.
  - Finance Secretary.
  - Secretary (Defence Production).
  - Secretary (Revenue).
  - Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
  - Secretary of the R&AW of the Cabinet Secretariat.
  - Secretary of the Department of Atomic Energy.
  - Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister.
  - Secretary of the Department of Space.
  - Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC).
- To service the work of the NSAB, SPG and NSC, a National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) was set up with an additional role of intelligence assessment through coordination of various of intelligence agencies. For this purpose, the JIC was merged with the NSCS.

The composition of the NSC is generally perceived as a mix of the American and British models of security management. The ideas of the NSC, NSA and the NSCS are being seen as borrowed from the US model. The UK did not have an NSC when India established one in 1998. However, the SPG was meant to retain the role of the Cabinet Secretary (as in the UK), in the national security policy-making and coordination roles (discussed in detail later). A study of these models in some detail would help us to assimilate this aspect better.

## NSC OF THE USA

The US was the first to realise the importance of such an integrated, well-structured approach which was reflected in the creation of the National Security Council (NSC) with a dedicated national security staff in 1947. It is the President's principal forum for considering national security and foreign policy matters with his senior national security advisers and Cabinet officials. The NSC is chaired by the President. Its regular attendees (both statutory and non-statutory) are the Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of Defence, and Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the statutory military adviser to the Council, and the Director of National Intelligence is the intelligence adviser. The Chief of Staff to the President, Counsel to the President, and the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy are invited to attend all NSC meetings while heads of other executive departments and agencies, as well as other senior officials, are invited to attend meetings when appropriate. It is designated by law (National Security Act of 1947) to examine in depth national security issues, strategic or tactical, and come up with policy responses for approval by the President and subsequent implementation by different departments concerned with national security. It is a multi-tiered structure which considers policy at three levels as follows:

- At the apex is the Principal Committee.
- There are several sub-committees to assist the Principal Committee. For instance, the Sub-Committee on National Security supervises the functioning of the Department of Homeland Security.
- Deputies Committee – a sub-Cabinet inter-agency which ensures adequate consideration of issues before they are presented to the NSC.

Policy coordination committees are formed to analyse the ongoing inputs and provide these to the senior committees. The principal task of

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the NSC, with the NSA acting as its manager and facilitator, is essentially to integrate the foreign and defence policies in such a manner as to protect national security and advance US national interests abroad. In this system, the NSA performs two roles: adviser to the President on all matters concerning national security and coordinator of the national security mechanism on behalf of the President. It is interesting to note that the Director, Central Intelligence, and the Chairman,

Joint Chiefs of Staff, serve as advisers to the NSC and not to the NSA.

The Vietnam War, relations with Iran, the 9/11 incident, and the post-9/11 developments in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq are not considered as testimonials to the good functioning of the US national security system which has come under constant criticism. But it needs to be acknowledged that the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security and certain other initiatives based on the advice of the NSC have shown encouraging results in preventing terrorist attacks on US soil since 9/11.

### **NSC, UK**

In the British model that existed before May 2010, the Cabinet Secretary coordinated the functioning of the national security apparatus which included the intelligence agencies—civilian as well as military. The government uses a network of committees chaired by the Prime Minister and comprising the Cabinet Ministers for principal decision-making. The principal departments which dealt with national security were the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Cabinet Office, Foreign and the Commonwealth Office, MoD, and Home Office. The Cabinet Secretary was assisted in his task by the Permanent Secretaries Committee on the Intelligence Services, the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), who wore a second hat as Director, Security and Intelligence Matters, and the heads of the agencies dealing with disaster and consequence management. It must be noted that the Cabinet Secretary was only a coordinator and had a very limited role in the formulation and implementation of foreign and defence policies, which



were largely managed by the respective political and professional heads of the Foreign Office and the Defence Department. The JIC Chairman was responsible for the assessment of the intelligence provided by the agencies, for monitoring their performance and for coordinating physical security.

As a consequence of the 9/11 attack in the US, repeated concerns were voiced over the need to institutionalise the national security mechanism further. Accordingly, Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2002 created the post of Security and Intelligence Coordinator and Permanent Secretary in the Cabinet Office to take over the responsibilities of security and intelligence from the Cabinet Secretary. It was, however, laid down that he would report to the Cabinet Secretary and, through him, to the Prime Minister. It was also laid down that the JIC Chairman would report to the Cabinet Secretary and the Prime Minister in matters relating to intelligence assessment and to the Security and Intelligence Coordinator in all other matters. The Security and Intelligence Coordinator had no role in foreign and defence policy matters. The Prime Minister had in his office an adviser on foreign policy who assisted and advised him on foreign policy matters but surprisingly had no role in foreign policy formulation and implementation. This task was being performed by the political and professional heads of the Foreign Office.

In an attempt to resolve these shortcomings, Prime Minister David Cameron established a National Security Council (NSC) in May 2010, to oversee all aspects of Britain's security. It was announced that the NSC would integrate at the highest level the work of the foreign, defence, home, energy and international development departments, and all other arms of government contributing to national security. The council which is chaired by the Prime Minister, has the Deputy Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Home Secretary, Secretary of State for Defence, the Secretary of State for International Development, and Security Minister as members. Other Cabinet Ministers, including the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, attend as required. The Chief of the Defence Staff, heads of intelligence agencies and other senior officials also attend as required.

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Sir Peter Ricketts (Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) was appointed as National Security Adviser, a new role based in the Cabinet Office and was tasked to establish the national security structures to coordinate and deliver the government's international security agenda.

The Task Force headed by K.C. Pant had observed the strong and weak points of the US and UK models closely before recommending a suitable structure of the NSC for India. Perhaps the NSC would have been more effective if the Indian government had established the NSC and defined the role of the NSA through legislation (as in the US) so that it derived more authority in advice as well as implementation of policies. The NSC of the USA was established and structured differently, and modified from time to time, to respond to the needs of a Presidential democracy where the President is the supreme authority on matters of security. It may, however, be noted that in the US model, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the statutory military adviser to the Council, while in the UK, the Chief of the Defence Staff attends the council meetings as required. In the Indian model, neither the Chiefs of Staff nor the Chairman COSC are part of the apex decision-making body of the NSC. It appears that the UK has borrowed the concept of excluding the military leadership from the apex council from India. However, the NSC of the UK is at a nascent stage and needs to be allowed more time for establishing the necessary framework and demonstrating its functioning before its effectiveness is commented upon.

#### **NSC OF INDIA: A PERFORMANCE AUDIT**

When established in 1998, the NSC was expected to play a major role in identifying and addressing issues concerning national security. Though not openly articulated in any document, three main roles which the NSC should have attempted to undertake are:

- Aid the government in formulating a National Security Strategy and National Security Objectives from which the objectives of military, intelligence and other security organisations could be drawn.
- Collect and integrate the strategic inputs from strategic experts, academia and think-tanks for objective evaluation, assessment and recommendation.
- Facilitate decision-making by the highest political authority by providing collective and considered advice on all issues concerning security

If one were to consider these as vital objectives of the NSC and conduct a performance audit of its functioning since its inception, the results are unlikely to be encouraging. Its weaknesses were conclusively exposed for the first time during the Kargil conflict when it failed to play any meaningful role. It is reported that one meeting was convened during the crisis in which the NSAB members were urged to confine their intervention to three minutes without indulging in any criticism. The weakness of the NSC was once again exposed in the handling of the IC-814 hijack crisis in December 1999. Not only did the apex council not react quickly enough to retain the hijacked aircraft at Amritsar, it also failed to persuade the United Arab Emirates authorities to detain the aircraft at Dubai (as they did in 1984 with the hijacked IA plane). The delay in commencing negotiations at Kandahar, and the decision to release three dreaded terrorists exposed the limitations of the NSC and its advisory elements. Escalation of the proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir and other northeastern states, and the intensification of Naxal activities in at least six states over the last decade reveal serious shortcomings in the functioning of the NSC. Some vital observations are:

- The first major criticism against the NSC is that it has only met sporadically since its inception, and not at regular intervals as one would expect<sup>6</sup>.
- A separate Secretariat should have been created to service the NSC, leaving the JIC to perform its specialist role. Experts have criticised that

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6. Also commented by the GoM in its report – Reforming the National Security System, available at <http://mod.nic.in/nuewadditions/rcontents.htm>

the merging of the JIC with the NSCS has proved counter-productive by removing even the limited analytical capability which we had before 1998<sup>7</sup>. Apparently, the JIC has been revived and a Chairman appointed to oversee its working<sup>8</sup> but this hasn't made any dramatic impact on the functioning of the intelligence establishment .

- The 32-member NSAB has a predominant representation of retired government officials, depriving it of the experience and guidance from experts in other fields. Experts have questioned the practical ability of retired officials in influencing decisions of the NSC. A former Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, wrote, "In India, no advisory board manages to be the core. One must keep the realities of life in view while pondering over its (NSAB) efficiency and value<sup>9</sup>."
- The SPG, which mainly comprised Secretaries from various ministries, is not very different from the Committee of Secretaries. It is unlikely to serve as an independent think-tank capable of providing innovative solutions or even ensure precise execution during the implementation phase.
- The NSCS tends to work more as a post office for collecting the views of other departments/agencies, collating and analysing them and putting them up for the perusal of the SPG. There is very little innovation and new thinking in the policy-making process, the ground work for which must be done in the NSCS.<sup>10</sup>
- The NSCS is headed by the Deputy National Security Adviser (DNSA), an officer of the rank of Secretary to the government. He is accountable to the NSA and not to the Cabinet Secretary (initially, the NSCS was part of the Cabinet Secretariat, but in 2002, it was transferred to the PMO). The Cabinet Secretary, who presides over the SPG meetings and takes the necessary follow-up action, has very little control over the functioning of the NSCS.

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7. B. Raman, "National Security Mechanism", *South Asia Analysis Group Paper* 1228, January 2005.

8. "India's Comprehensive National Power: Synergy Through Joint Decision-Making," a study report by the Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS), 2009.

9. A. K. Verma, "National Security – An Eyewash?" *South Asia Analysis Group Paper*, December 1998.

10. Raman, n. 7.

- The Intelligence Coordination Group under the NSA was created to facilitate coordination between various intelligence agencies but regrettably this had fallen into disuse.
- Absence of Service Chiefs in the apex council has further divorced the military high command from the national security decision-making mechanism.<sup>11</sup>

In an ideal scenario, the NSAB should look into the future and provide considered advice in the form of alternative solutions to a given scenario. The SPG should take cognisance of the NSAB's advice in framing suitable policy options for consideration by the apex council. However, in reality, it has been observed by experts that the interaction between the NSAB and SPG is minimal and the contribution of the NSAB has been nominal. In effect, successive governments have failed to utilise the potential of the NSC as an effective national security apparatus. P.M. Kamath has written, "The non-use of the NSC exposes the ad hoc nature of our security policy process. Consequently, more Kargil-like crises are bound to occur in the future"<sup>12</sup>.

Having seen the genesis, growth, effectiveness and shortcomings of the NSC, it is clear that its potential has not been exploited. It is the NSA who is normally in focus rather than the NSC. If the inadequacies are not addressed soon, the NSC would meet a fate similar to the erstwhile short-lived National Defence Council (NDC). It may be recalled that a National Defence Council was formed in November 1962 under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister Nehru. It had two sub-committees: the Central Citizens Committee and Military Affairs Committee<sup>13</sup>. The former consisted of retired senior government officials, eminent public workers and representatives of state governments besides the members of the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet. The Military Affairs Committee, chaired by the Defence Minister, comprised the Service Chiefs, Defence Secretary and two former Chiefs

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11. Dr Subash Kapila, "India's National Security Council-A Critical Review", *South Asia Analysis Group Paper* 123, May 2000.

12. P. M. Kamath, "National Security Council: Reluctantly Created and Under-Utilised", *The IUP Journal of Governance and Public Policy*, vol. I, issue I, 2006, p. 41.

13. Annual Report of the MoD 1964-65, p. 114.

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of Staff as members. The Citizens Committee was meant to review defence issues in general, whereas the Military Committee was meant to discuss the military aspects of defence. Though the council met a few times in the subsequent years, it was not as effective as envisaged and served no gainful purpose.

The recent trend indicates the government's preference for consideration of major national security issues through the CCS rather than the NSC.

One possible reason for this strange phenomenon is the populous three-tiered structure of the NSC. The number of members in each component of the NSC complicates even the convening of a meeting – leave alone the idea of debating contentious issues. It would indeed be a time-consuming process to assemble the NSAB, ascertain its advice, debate it in the SPG for feasibility and finally put it to the NSC for consideration.\* On the other hand, the CCS is a small group adequately empowered to take decisions on a fast track. But the question is: is the CCS sufficiently informed and advised to take the crucial decisions on issues affecting the nation's security? It would be of interest to study the function of the CCS.

### **CCPA AND CCS**

The principal decision-making bodies in India are the various Cabinet Committees. The CCPA and the CCS are the most widely represented bodies of the Cabinet and comprise important Ministers of the Union Ministry. These two committees have also been in the past, sporadically established and dissolved at the pleasure of the government in office. The first Administrative Reforms Commission which submitted its report to the government in 1969, recommended creation of 11 Standing Committees of the Cabinet of which 'defence' was first in the list. Instead of creating

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\* Editor's note: The NSC was—and is—a committee of the Cabinet chaired by the PM, like the CCS. Hence, the author and many others are wrong in assuming that all elements of the national security management would have to be present when the NSC meets.

a separate committee for defence, the government established the CCPA in 1969 with a clarification that all important questions relating to defence were to be dealt with by the CCPA.<sup>14</sup> This indirectly implied that the Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC) and the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet (ECC), which were existing on paper, were dissolved.<sup>15</sup> The CCPA was chaired by the Prime Minister and consisted of the Ministers for Home, Finance, Defence and External Affairs as members. For obvious reasons, the CCPA could not devote adequate time and attention to the critical security issues as it was seen to be handling domestic political issues more often. During Smt Indira Gandhi's later part of the term as Prime Minister and subsequently during Shri Rajiv Gandhi's prime ministership, a Parliamentary Board was set in place to consider important political issues and the CCPA became gradually redundant. During Shri Narsimha Rao's regime, the CCPA was reactivated since he chose to discontinue the concept of a Parliamentary Board. However, once again, the focus of the CCPA could not remain security alone as it gradually got engulfed in political issues.

Under the prime ministership of Shri A. B. Vajpayee, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government abolished the CCPA and established the CCS. The composition of the CCS was similar to that of the CCPA and in the absence of another body to deal with domestic political issues, this too gradually acquired a somewhat omnibus character, dealing with questions, which were strictly political in nature. The composition of the CCS during this regime reflected the political equations within the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and alliance partners in the NDA but curiously included Mr. K. C. Pant in his capacity as Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission as a member.

Dr Manmohan Singh, as Prime Minister in 2004, possibly considered the inconsistencies in the functioning of these committees and, hence, constituted both Sub-Committees of the Cabinet – CCS and the CCPA—with the Prime

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14. Annual Reports of the MoD until 1970-71 emphasised this aspect.

15. Annual Reports of the MoD until 1969-70 mentioned the DCC and ECC as the highest decision-making bodies on security issues. No mention of the DCC or ECC was made in the report of 1970-71 or in any subsequent annual report and nor was any mention made about their fate after 1970.

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Minister as the Chairman and Cabinet Secretary as the Secretary for both committees. The CCS included the Defence Minister, Home Minister, Finance Minister and External Affairs Minister as members besides the NSA as an ex-officio member. The Service Chiefs were to be invited based on the nature of the issue discussed. The CCPA not only includes the key Ministers who are members of the CCS but also others such as the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Railways, HRD, etc. in an apparent bid to accommodate the political alliance partners in governmental decision-making.

The composition of the CCS has been changed from time to time, according to political realignments. However, as it stands today, the CCS deals with all issues of national security be it the purchase of arms for the armed forces or deployment/withdrawal of central police forces to deal with Naxal/insurgency crises. The CCPA deals with domestic political issues such as the Cauvery river dispute or the Sethusamudram project, on the one hand, and larger issues of international importance such as the Indo-US nuclear deal or India's vote on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution, etc, on the other.

Considering the fact that the CCS is the highest decision-making body on all national security issues, including military issues, there is a tendency among some experts to equate it with the erstwhile Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC), positioning it at the apex of the Indian HDO. Though practically the CCS attempts to perform the role of the DCC, a conservative student of defence affairs would find it difficult to legitimise this arrangement because of the following reasons:

- The CCS addresses all issues encompassing the wider contemporary definition of national security, among which defence just happens to be one.
- The CCS lacks the necessary inputs from supporting structures such as the JIC, Joint Planning Staff or the Integrated Defence Staff. As a result, the CCS is unable to provide any defence policy guidance to the armed



forces or get involved in defence planning activities.

- The Chiefs of Staff have no permanent representation on the CCS as was the case with the erstwhile DCC.
- Defence as a sector demands constant focus which cannot be provided by the CCS owing to its preoccupation with other internal security and other issues.

While this is the scenario in peace-time, the CCS is expected to dictate the military objectives and approve the military plans during inter-state conflicts involving India. Does it have sufficient wherewithal to undertake this mandate? Some major inadequacies that would have a telling effect on the functioning of the CCS during war are:

- The JIC is under the NSC while the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the Defence Planning Staff are under the control of the Chairman COSC [through the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (CIDS)]. Tactical intelligence would, hence, suffer.
- The Secretariats for the NSC, CCS and COSC are provided by three different agencies, namely, the NSCS, Cabinet Secretariat, and Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) respectively. Information sharing and inter-Secretarial coordination are critical to security issues which involve multi-agency participation. Otherwise, this can result in a serious information deficit at the highest levels during crisis situations.

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The issue gets further complicated when seen from the nuclear standpoint, particularly in an inter-state conflict scenario. For a country like India which promises deterrence on a counter-strike doctrine, C2 is the soul of the nuclear strategy. C2 structures need to be capable of conceiving the role of nuclear weapons, plan their dispersal and deployment besides being adequately empowered to authorise their use when necessary. It would be

of interest to examine if the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) of India meets these objectives.

## NUCLEAR COMMAND AUTHORITY

One of the first challenging tasks that came the way of the NSAB soon after its institution was to script a nuclear doctrine for India. Having successfully conducted nuclear tests in 1998, the Indian government was under immense international pressure. In an attempt to apprise the domestic and global audience of India's strategy to employ nuclear capabilities and, in the same breath, assure the global community that India was a responsible regional power, the NSAB produced the draft nuclear doctrine in August 1999, laying out a robust C2 structure which validated India's credibility of nuclear deterrence. It stated, "Nuclear weapons shall be tightly controlled and released for use at the highest political level."<sup>16</sup> It further stated, "An effective and survivable command and control system with requisite flexibility and responsiveness shall be in place"<sup>17</sup>. India produced a credible document within 15 months after the successful conduct of nuclear tests, whereas it took 15 years for the US to formulate its nuclear doctrine. This demonstrated to the world India's seriousness in deterrence and its commitment to No First Use (NFU). Summing up the doctrine, C. Raja Mohan wrote, "Maximum restraint in the use of nuclear weapons, absolute political control over decision-making and an effective interface between civilian and military leaders" were the positives<sup>18</sup>. The draft doctrine was made available for public scrutiny and debate and it was not until January 4, 2003 (four and half years after declaring itself a nuclear weapon power), that the government announced the creation of the Nuclear Command Authority comprising a two layered structure – the Political Council assisted by an Executive Council. The NCA is responsible for deployment, control and safety of Indian nuclear weapon assets. Chaired by the Prime Minister, the Political Council is the only body empowered to take decision on nuclear issues

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16. Para 5.1 of the Draft Report of the NSAB on the Indian Nuclear Doctrine, August 17, 1999.

17. Ibid., para 5.2

18. C. Raja Mohan, *The Hindu* (New Delhi), January 4, 2003.

while the ultimate decision to authorise the use of nuclear weapons rests solely with the Prime Minister. The Strategic Forces Command, which is meant to manage the nuclear arsenal is composed of the representatives of the three Services besides a fair number of civilian staff, including experts from the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), DAE and missile experts from the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

The actual composition of the Political and Executive Councils has not been officially announced, but it is believed that the membership of the Political Council is similar to that of the CCS (PM, Defence Minister, Home Minister, External Affairs Minister and Finance Minister) though it was reported in 2003 that the Political Council includes only the PM, Deputy Prime Minister (if any), Ministers for Defence and External Affairs<sup>19</sup>. The Executive Council, which is chaired by the NSA, not only provides the necessary inputs for effective decision-making by the Political Council but is also responsible for executing the directives received from the Political Council. Membership of the council, it is believed, comprises the Service Chiefs alongside the Secretaries of key ministries. Without discussing the details, an official announcement regarding the alternate chain of command said, "It (CCS) has reviewed and approved the arrangements for alternate chains of command for retaliatory nuclear strikes in all eventualities"<sup>20</sup>. This is a reference to a situation in which the Prime Minister or the entire Political Council may be incapacitated during a crisis. It is believed that the US nuclear C2 system caters for the worst nuclear scenario and a 16-member line of succession has been designated<sup>21</sup>. Salient features of India's nuclear doctrine which have a definite bearing on the C2 structures are:

- Building and maintaining a credible minimum deterrent.
- Policy of "no first use"; and retaliatory attacks can be authorised only by the civilian political leadership through the NCA.
- Nuclear weapon assemblies are with the DRDO, the weapon cores are with the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), and delivery systems are with the Services.

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19. J.N. Dixit, "India's Nuclear Command Authority: Talks Ahead," *NEWS*, January 27, 2003.

20. Raja Mohan, n. 18.

21. Dixit, n. 19.

- In the event of a major attack against India or Indian forces anywhere, by biological or chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons.

Some experts have commented that the Political and the Executive Councils do not confirm to a command structure and, hence, this raises doubts about their efficacy during a nuclear attack<sup>22</sup>. It has also been criticised that the NCA structure has added one more layer to the committee system which, in a crisis situation, would only result in waste of time<sup>23</sup>. It may be recollected that the CCS includes the Ministers of Defence, Home, Finance and External Affairs besides the NSA who is an ex-officio member. Given the fact that the Political Council of the NCA is advised by the Executive Council which is chaired by the NSA, the composition of both councils seems identical.

The doctrine places great emphasis on the safety of the nuclear arsenal not only during the peace-time but also in war. Given the importance of checks and balances in our nuclear policy, it is imperative that a divided control over the nuclear arsenal exists. While the nuclear forces are expected to be maintained in the form of separated components in the custody of the civilians and the military, the command over their use lies solely with the civilian leadership. But in the event of a necessity to launch nuclear weapons, the nuclear components would have to be integrated into a suitable weapon system and the custody along with responsibility of delivery is to be transferred to the military leadership. This seems quite simple on paper but is undoubtedly the most complicated part of the whole process and is bound to fail unless there is an optimum integration between the HDO and NCA. On the other hand, there has to be a high level of coordination between the NSC and NCA. This is because the inputs from NSAB and SPG would play a major role in the decision-making by the Political Council of the NCA (the composition of which is similar to the apex council of the NSC). The

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22. Rear Admiral Raja Menon, *Nuclear Seminar Report*, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, March 12, 2003.

23. Ibid.

NSA serves as the conduit between the political and military segments of the NCA but the larger issues of functional and command relationships among the HDO, NCA and NSC have neither been specified nor discussed openly.

What makes matters worse is that the structure and composition of the NCA keeps the leadership of the armed forces completely outside the decision-making loop, as in the NSC. In complete contrast, the NCA of Pakistan which functions through two committees, namely the Employment Control Committee and the Development Control Committee has on the membership of both the Committees, the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and the three Service Chiefs. Besides, the Strategic Planning Division which provides secretarial support to the NCA, functions directly under the Chairman JCSC and is headed by a General from the army. On one end of the spectrum is Pakistan's Strategic Command Organisation, which is predominantly military while, on the other, is India's NCA. There is a definite case for higher representation by India's military leadership in the country's nuclear decision-making.<sup>24</sup>

It also needs to be recognised that the nuclear assets, unlike in the USA or China, are dispersed among the DRDO, DAE and the three armed forces, demanding a continual integration and coordination for training, deployment and application during war. Most of the delivery systems currently are conventional platforms meant for dual use. This demands the highest level of planning and integration not only among the Services but also with the components of the Strategic Forces Command.

## THE WAY FORWARD

It is appreciated that the NSC, CCS and NCA have definitive and distinctive roles to perform though the composition at the apex may look similar. But

**The structure and composition of the NCA keeps the leadership of the armed forces completely outside the decision-making loop, as in the NSC.**

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24. For more in support of this argument, see chapter 5 "Hand on the Button – Nuclear Command and Control", in Manpreet Sethi, *Nuclear Strategy- India's March Towards Credible Deterrence* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2009).

**It is imperative to separate the military issues from other internal security issues by establishing a Cabinet Committee for Defence (CCD)**

the effectiveness of these entities would depend entirely upon the ability to extract the maximum potential of their support structures through optimum lateral coordination and integrated thinking.

**NSC:** As regards the NSC, it is unfortunate that some experts have called for dismantling of the NSAB on the grounds that its contribution till date has been negligible and it has not served its

purpose. But if analysed correctly, it would emerge that the NSAB could be a very effective tool if utilised correctly. With members of varied expertise and experience on board, the NSAB is easily the most enriched body of collective intelligence mandated to advise the government. The fact that most of the members are retired and not subject to political or peer pressures gives them the opportunity to be forthright in their opinions, without having to mince words. The first step in the process of its revitalisation has to be the reduction in its membership to at least just half the present number, preferably to ten members. This would provide more objectivity and ease in integration. Secondly, a mandated in-built mechanism for lateral coordination between the NSAB and SPG at regular intervals needs to be introduced if the NSAB is to be taken seriously. The presence of Service Chiefs in the SPG is not adequate when instant military opinion is needed. Hence, there is a need to create space in the apex council for the military leadership.

**CCPA and CCS:** Given the political pressures of running coalition governments, the current model of continuing with the CCS as well as the CCPA is understandable. But there is still a need to handle the security issues with a clinical sense of super-specialisation – meaning, that it is imperative to separate the military issues from other internal security issues by establishing a Cabinet Committee for Defence (CCD) or a Cabinet Committee for Military Affairs (CCMA) to provide defence policy guidance and focus on the aspects of defence planning and management. Since the current composition of the CCS and apex council of the NSC is almost

identical, the latter can conveniently undertake the former's task. In other words, the CCS can be reconstituted as the CCD/CCMA with Serving Chiefs serving as ex-officio members of the committee. The NSC, which deals with all security issues, should take complete charge of internal security management, for which it is suitably equipped.

**NCA:** India's nuclear doctrine which is based on the belief that nuclear weapons are to be seen as political instruments of deterrence rather than as tools of war-fighting possibly influenced the minds of policy-makers in keeping the military leadership out of the nuclear decision-making loop. "This cannot be an optimum model for credible deterrence" and "the close inter-linkage between conventional war and nuclear deterrence, makes it imperative that the interface between the political and military leadership must be far more than the present Political Council envisages," writes Manpreet Sethi, regarding nuclear command and control in India. Arguing that the level of alert of the nuclear arsenal will be determined by the unfolding conventional crises and more importantly the dispersed elements of the nuclear arsenal will have to be congregated even as the conventional operations are on, Sethi calls for a review of the nuclear command and control for India wherein the three Service Chiefs are made members of the Political Council since they can provide the necessary military advice directly to the decision-making body.<sup>25</sup>

But this recommendation has been challenged by a counter-argument that the Political Council is meant to take decisions with a view that nuclear weapons are essentially political instruments and, hence, the presence of military members on the council would "impact the complexion of India's approach to nuclear weapons altogether". Besides, to have the Chiefs alongside the civilian Ministers "would be to privilege them beyond the

**The close inter-linkage between conventional war and nuclear deterrence, makes it imperative that the interface between the political and military leadership must be far more than the present Political Council envisages.**

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25. Ibid., pp. 164-165.

limits of the Indian system of military subordination to civilian control”<sup>26</sup>. First, it needs to be appreciated that the presence of the Service Chiefs on the Political Council is only meant to provide the political leadership with timely military advice, assuming that they would normally be unaware of the operational capabilities and limitations of the various weapon systems, knowledge of which is essential before a political decision is made with regard to the nature and quantum of a retaliatory nuclear strike. It is, indeed, unfortunate that the concept of ‘military subordination to civilian control’ is understood in such a distorted fashion which, in the right sense is nothing more than emphasising the primacy of the elected democratic leadership over all the instruments of state, including the military. There is also an impression that the Political Council need not have all the three Chiefs as members but only the Chairman COSC, who will be replaced by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), when appointed. This suggestion has some merit though there are inherent limitations in leaving the responsibility of advice to a single individual – whatever be the appointment. The bottom-line though, is the inescapable necessity of military representation on the Political Council.

#### **LATERAL INTEGRATION IMPERATIVE**

Elected representatives in India who enforce the accountability of policy-makers often lack an in-depth understanding of the increasingly complicated security related issues. It is not surprising then, that the country had to wait for more than 60 years after independence to see an NSC in formation. Unfortunately, successive governments have failed to utilise the NSC as an effective, coordinated and well articulated national security policy-making apparatus. The NSC needs to be provided with long-term and current intelligence assessments. The CCS and NSC need to complement each other’s roles and, if need be, combined into one single entity to address all issues of national security, with special focus on internal security management. Defence has to be handled by a separate committee of the Cabinet which would also replace the Political Council of the NCA. This is important since

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26. Ali Ahmed, “Re-visioning the NCA,” *IDSA Comment*, September 2009.



our nuclear doctrine and strategy is tailored to provide national (nuclear) self-defence.

To realise our true national potential as a regional power involved in peace-keeping, counter-terrorism operations, maritime security and disaster relief operations all over the globe, it is imperative that a National Security Mechanism is in place which would take an integrated view of the challenges faced, the options available, and take proactive steps to counter threats. This calls for close integration between the conventional HDO and other institutions of national security.