



Centre for Air Power Studies

Report

Roundtable Discussion

on

“Military Diplomacy: Role of Defence Attachés”

(Organised by Centre for Air Power Studies on 22nd March 2023 at Conference Hall, Air Force Auditorium, Subroto Park, New Delhi)

Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) organized the roundtable discussion on ***“Military Diplomacy: Role of Defence Attachés”***. The seminar featured distinguished speakers including serving members of the armed forces and Indian Foreign Service. During the proceedings, the participants deliberated on various aspects of military diplomacy, aerial diplomacy, role of defence attachés and representation of Indian Air Forces in foreign missions. The discussions also underlined the importance of policy planning, role of HADR and military exercises, peaceful and coercive aspect of military diplomacy, defence cooperation and voids in military diplomacy. The opening remarks were given by **Air Marshal Anil Chopra PVSM AVSM VM VSM (Retd), Director General, CAPS**, followed by the session on **Military Diplomacy: Role of Defence Attachés, and Q&A session**. The session was chaired by **Shri G Parthasarathy, Chancellor, Central University of Jammu, Former High Commissioner to Pakistan, Australia**.

Agenda Discussion

During the course of discussions, the role of armed forces, especially DAs in support of foreign policy objectives was examined. Air Marshal Anil Chopra mentioned that while the role of the Armed Forces to support India's foreign policy has been very clear, Indian diplomacy should find effective ways to integrate the military into policy-making.

The global standing and politics continues to be influenced by military hard power. The military power itself flows from economic and technological capabilities. India is now a major military power with a credible missile program and established nuclear deterrence. It is a 'net security provider' with the ability to launch global Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). Since India has great power ambitions, more visible military participation in policy making is desirous.



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Recent events such as the evacuation of Indians during Ukraine conflict and the 'Op Dosti' in the aftermath of earthquake in Turkey has proved that the role of armed forces will be a crucial enabler in this respect. The complex security challenges that India faces in the modern geopolitical environment, and is likely to face in future require a much closer involvement of our military in assessing these challenges and devising a comprehensive strategy to deal with them. As India seeks to exploit its comprehensive national power towards securing its national interests, it must optimally leverage the capacity of its armed forces in support of foreign policy. It calls for better civil-military integration, and closer coordination between MoD and MEA.

While Military officers play a major role in defence wings of Indian embassies abroad, the representation of military officers in the policy structures such as National Security Council Secretariat and MEA desks is adequate.

Dr Sumit Seth from MEA discussed about the ingredients of foreign policy planning and emphasised that instead of having siloed approach, it is important to have collaborative approach or one unit approach in embassies.

Air Vice Marshal RK Obheroi explained the concept of current military diplomacy and voids in it especially regarding the training teams, long duration courses and selling the country narrative. The example of Ukraine was highlighted wherein, there was a comprehensive plan for evacuation.

Air Vice Marshal Ashish Vohra emphasized on enhancing the role of Defence Attaches and focused on the idea of increasing the salience of military diplomacy as part of the overall foreign policy. The role of the defence attaches (DAs) transcends several domains, and that role of defence attaches includes intelligence services along with enhancing defence cooperation.

Recommendations

Indian military's role in India's foreign policy has to expand. Defence diplomacy is an important part of national diplomacy. Both the foreign and defence policies should work in tandem.

Presently the onus of critical missions such as HADR lies with DAs deployed in Indian missions abroad. It is therefore essential to analyse the effectiveness of the current structures and deliberate on the required measures for further enhancing the mission capabilities.



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DAs must also be empowered and should place additional focus on soft power measures such as commemorative exchanges.

There is a vital need to have more IAF DAs and representation of IAF in Foreign Missions.

Prognosis

The discussions clearly brought out that an enhanced role of Armed forces in conducting military diplomacy and achieving desired synergy between various stakeholders will pay better dividends. The growing profile of India on regional and international stage will demand a proactive foreign policy approach in which armed forces must play a critical role. An objective examination of current profile and resources available is imperative to optimally prepare the three services for performing this critical responsibility.