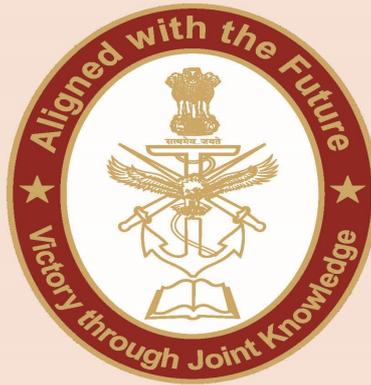


CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

ONE BORDER, ONE FORCE, ONE MINISTRY

BY

MAJ GEN HARSHA KAKAR (RETD)

There have been two recent announcements by the MHA which indicates lack of clarity and strategic foresight in matters pertaining to national security. The first is its intention of moving the Coast Guard from the MoD to under its control, a proposal for which has been forwarded to the MoD. It has been also learnt that the MoD is not in consonance with this thought process. The second is shifting the HQs of the IG of ITBP (equivalent to a Maj Gen) from Chandigarh to Leh. In both cases the logic given was to enhance coordination between different agencies.

The thought behind changing control of the Coast Guard appears to be a 2018 report by a BSF led high level committee of police officers. This report suggested that the Coast Guard be made responsible for shallow waters as the navy has control of the 'waterbodies beyond the borders.' The report raised concerns on security of India's domestic transport channels on land and water.

By placing it under the MHA, the report suggested, it could coordinate better with the IB, RAW, Narcotics bureau and state police. Basically, the MHA desires to employ it for domestic purposes as also act as a link with the navy. This is in contrast with the MoD's perception of the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard has already been tasked with securing the Exclusive Economic Zone, prevent terrorist attacks from the sea, control pollution and check sea vessels in an anti-smuggling role. This is in addition to its role of rescue at sea. It has thus been accordingly structured, trained and equipped. Hence, the MoD feels it cannot be spared for domestic roles.

The navy and the coast guard operate seamlessly as they both serve under the same ministry and the coast guard is under naval command. By removing the

coast guard, the entire responsibility would shift to the navy compelling it to be responsible for much more than it is envisaged to handle. With present shortcomings in naval power, such a situation is not ideal. Hence, it does not make strategic sense to shift the Coast Guard presently.

In the case of the move of the IG of ITBP to Leh, the statement read that it was being done to counter the ever-increasing Chinese build up in the region. It added that the shift will allow better interaction between the two forces (army and ITBP) for 'strategic and defence planning'. The army has repeatedly been demanding operational control of the ITBP deployed along the Chinese border, which has been turned down by the MHA. This move will add to management issues at the critical level.

Further, the MHA has also approved the creation of three sectors, under the now relocated Leh frontier, one each based in Leh, Srinagar and Chandigarh, headed by a DIG. Once this restructuring is complete, a new ITBP Western Command, headed by an Additional DG (equivalent to a Lt Gen) would be raised and located in Chandigarh. This will control the Leh frontier.

Within the Indian political and bureaucratic hierarchy there is a confusion in understanding the concept of management of security of borders. India has two types of borders, the International Border (IB), where there are no major disputes and the disputed borders.

Along IB, the responsibility should be that of the MHA. This includes the IB with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar. The Assam Rifles deployed along the Myanmar border is to check the insurgency from across and hence should continue. Thus, along these borders the forces deployed should remain the BSF or the SSB, both of which operate under the MHA.

Where there are territorial disputes, mainly along the LoC with Pakistan and the LAC with China, the responsibility should be that of the MoD. The escalation of firing on the LoC and the standoffs along the LAC, post Chinese incursions are handled by the army, operating under directions of the CCS, conveyed through the MoD. Hence, forces deployed along these borders, irrespective of the uniform and ministry under which they operate should function under the army.

Defending turfs, seeking to maintain control over these forces and refusing to place them under the army enhances problems of cohesive employment of these forces. By adding additional HQs, each seeking to be another hurdle in existing functioning, adds to problems. Ideally, the army would place central police force units deployed in the region under divisions and where essential under brigades responsible for operations in the area.

Additional levels of different force HQs imply delays in acting on directions especially in moments of crises, as these units would only take orders from their own chain of command. This would defeat the very purpose for which they were deployed in the initial phase itself.

Similarly, flow of information from these units would add an additional channel as it would neither come directly or at the desired pace. Lack of cooperation between the agency deployed along the IB and the army located in depth continues. The army presently adopts innovative techniques to ensure that intelligence flows to it almost simultaneously, rather than delayed if it banks on official channels.

The level of cooperation between different forces would depend on the attitude of senior officers of both the army and the IPS. Since these forces are not under command, cooperation is only possible in case there is immense understanding. Clash of personalities or ego can seriously impact functioning, which is detrimental during crises. Such a situation is undesirable and unwarranted.

In national interest, ministries must reconsider their desire to directly control central forces which are under them but deployed in sensitive areas. These have been created for specific tasks and deployed accordingly. Their employment in operations is the responsibility of the army. Similarly, even during periods of crises, they are under the army. An additional gain of being placed under the army is that their regular training can be conducted in terrain specific training schools established by the army under each Corps.

One border, one force and thus one ministry responsible should be the mantra, rather than creating stumbling blocks in employment. The force responsible for the border should have the freedom to task these forces centrally, as they are meant to operate seamlessly for national security.

It is hoped that the CCS would reconsider the decisions of the MHA and separate responsibilities for borders. If it still must raise additional HQs for administrative purposes, then these should be placed under command of the force responsible, rather than alongside. It should be understood, that there is a vast difference between 'under command' and 'alongside for better strategic and defence planning.'

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