
Security of India's International Borders

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In the backdrop of recession and in the wake of the Mumbai carnage of 26/11, a news item appeared in the *Economic Times* dated Wednesday, 28 January 2009, headlined “Get Ready to March Past Job Blues, Literally.” In it, the expansion drive in the country’s para-military forces is highlighted with an announcement that 1,40,000 more personnel would be needed to improve upon surveillance and internal security. A caption alongside informs about the increase in the number of battalions in these forces by 29 battalions in the Border Security Force (BSF), 37 for the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), the force that is now assigned the guarding of the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders, and 10 battalions for the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, having now returned to govern with a much clearer and a confirmed mandate, its home minister lost no time in asking the central para-military forces to step up the recruitment—a news item to this effect appeared in the *Hindustan Times* of Wednesday, 25 May 2009, confirming the government’s resolve to ensure security and prevent a recurrence of another 26/11!

The concern of our government is accentuated equally by our citizenry when excerpts of an article by an analyst, Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch (Retd), appearing on the website of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies stated:

Firstly, a conventional military threat from Pakistan is all but over. We need to re-think our strategy on how to handle Pakistan, especially in case of another strike on India on the lines of 26/11. To retaliate against the Pakistani state will be playing into the hands of the Taliban. Not doing anything will be unacceptable to the Indian public opinion. The best course, therefore, would be prevention

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which in turn would require foolproof intelligence and well institutionalised response mechanisms. Secondly, should the Taliban presence become even partially effective in Punjab and Sindh, it would lead to a human exodus in millions. We would have to ensure that our borders are sealed or else we will be faced with very serious security concerns.

The lack of direction and focus in our border management is commented upon to emphasise that mere increase in numbers will not suffice when one views the present arrangements of command and control, organisational structure, mission statements, and in that backdrop, the ability of these organisations to effectively absorb technology towards enhancing efficiency in their assigned missions.

Presently, our border management is indicative of adhocism when viewed in the context of mission statement and structure of the security forces assigned towards the surveillance and security of various segments of our international borders (IB). The Group of Ministers (GOM) assigned to rationalise this important aspect of our security paradigm has only gone part of the way and left issues incomplete, which leaves adhocism in place and, regretfully, such adhocism thereby continues to sustain. Issues that have been left unaddressed or not adequately addressed are first highlighted:

- Duplicity is discerned in the deployment and responsibilities of managing the northern borders, in that, we have two agencies, that is, the army and the ITBP, manning the Sino-Indian border, whereas, the GOM committee report on border management emphatically recommends the arrangement of *one border-one force*¹.
- The same dichotomy persists in the arrangements in respect of surveillance and security of the Indo-Pak and Indo-Bangladesh borders. Though the GOM have been emphatic on the concept of one border-one force, the arrangements on these two of our international borders persist, with only one force continuing to guard our international borders with two different countries. That is, the BSF continues to guard both these borders.

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Whilst earlier, Bangladesh being part of Pakistan (as East Pakistan), such an arrangement could be accepted, now, with Bangladesh having been in existence for close to 38 years, continuance of one force guarding two widely separated international borders does not conform to the concept of one border-one force as propounded in the GOM's recommendations, and the arrangement is not conducive to efficiency either.

- It is relevant to mention at this point that prior to the recommendations of the GOM, the BSF was also deployed on some parts of the Indo-Myanmar border as well, though mostly this border remained under the surveillance of Assam Rifles. As of now, Assam Rifles, that was earlier deployed on the eastern segment of the Sino-Indian border and also on the Indo-Myanmar border, has now been withdrawn from the former and deployed only on the Indo-Myanmar border, thereby, ensuring that the one border-one force concept is fully implemented in respect of this particular international border.
- The SSB, whose mission statement has now been modified to ensure the surveillance of the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders, is deployed accordingly.

In the spirit of the GOM's recommendations and the emerging threats as now well identified, we do need to improve upon, and develop, a system of border management that ensures for the security forces so engaged, an effective arrangement of command and control, a clear mission statement, and structural compatibility that enables absorption of improved technology. The various border segments are discussed below separately.

Sino-Indian Border (Indo-Tibet Border)

In the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War-1962, a particular segment of the international border was taken over by the army in entirety and has been held in force ever since. Para-military forces operating on this border, at the time mostly Assam Rifles in the east and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) militia in Ladakh to the west, were driven-in under the command of the army. The J&K militia personnel were organised as the Ladakh Scouts and absorbed into the regular army in recognition of their performance in the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The nature of the terrain in this border region is very inhospitable that requires specialised training, proper acclimatisation and deployment of vast logistics establishments to ensure sustenance which can be provided only by

the army. The central sector of this border was identified formerly as the UP-Tibet border (now Uttarakhand-Tibet border); prior to 1962, this part of the border was under the charge of UP Border Police that could not ensure adequate surveillance and first the army filled the void by deploying in the area three scout battalions, one each raised by their regimental centres of the Dogra, Garhwal and Kumaon regiments. Later, some time in 1967, the UP Border Police was absorbed into the ITBP. Post Kargil-1999, rationalising the responsibilities in the GOM report, the ITBP was designated as the sole agency that was to be assigned the responsibilities of surveillance and security of the vast Sino-Indian (Indo-Tibet) border.

Problems relating to surveillance of the vast Indo-Tibet border are very different from those of the international borders with the other countries on our periphery. These are specifically highlighted:

- Unlike on our borders with other countries that include Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, on the Indo-Tibet border we are not faced with threats of infiltration by militants and other undesirable persons who may indulge in subversive and other forms of criminal activity in the interior of India. Border guarding here can only be selective by ensuring that the passes over which movement is possible, are effectively sealed by deploying company strong posts. The border is mostly aligned along the ridges that form the watershed line between India and Tibet where the altitude is in the bracket of 14,000 to 17,000 ft on an average and infiltration over such high mountains and inhospitable weather conditions is not possible.
- As mentioned, the borders are held in force by the army to safeguard against a repeat of the 1962-like invasion. The ITBP companies are deployed alongside the army and do not enjoy autonomous authority as for managing the related border issues. There is thus duplication and overlapping of responsibilities between two agencies of the government, from two different ministries, the army under the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the ITBP under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Repeated Chinese encroachments, particularly in the area south of McMahon Line, are indicative of continuance of hostile intentions that need to be dealt with firmly and entail a military response which, in effect, in most part, will need to be a riposte with massive artillery fire.

- Notwithstanding the thaw in the relationship, China's hostility towards India persists as evidenced by its claim on the Tawang tract and its involvement with Pakistan in developing its nuclear arsenal and the String of Pearls strategy around India within which it is developing the Gwadar port on the coast of Balochistan to eventually flex its muscle in the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea.

The above analysis should convince us that repeated Chinese encroachments, particularly in the area south of McMahon Line, are indicative of continuance of hostile intentions that need to be dealt with firmly. Specifying firmness in dealing with such repeated encroachments would entail a military response which, in effect, in most part, will need to be a riposte with massive artillery fire. I would now draw the attention of the readers to the confrontation with China across Nathula (Sikkim) in 1967 when retaliation from own side with massive artillery fire made the Chinese stop their encroachments, and since then, they have not indulged in any form of aggressive activity in this segment of the border.

Inference from the above analysis would suggest that the entire international border with China, that is, the Indo-Tibet border, should be handed over to the army and managed under the aegis of the MoD and unnecessary duplication of deploying an agency of the MHA, that is, the ITBP, eliminated. As described, the latter is not equipped or trained to cope with situations that may develop on this border.

There are only two entry/exit points through which cross-border movement is permitted for trade and pilgrimage. These points are Nathula in Sikkim wherein trans-border trade between Gangtok and Lhasa has been resumed, and across the Uttarakhand-Tibet border through which the pilgrims travel to Kailash-Mansarovar. Managing the trans-border traffic at these points will require a customs post and a police station of the state police to ensure the authority of law to check criminal activity in any form. Being in a far-flung/isolated border area, these establishments will need security and the army can meet this requirement through a statutory enjoyment.

Apart from the two specific points discussed above, there is no other area where police presence is required. No Chinese movement south of the McMahon Line or any other undemarcated watershed line is permitted and any such movement/encroachment in defiance of accepted norms will need to be resisted militarily lest we find ourselves preempted like in Aksai Chin in 1960. Considering the hazardous nature of terrain that precludes rapid infantry movement, hostile encroachments will often necessitate the use of artillery

firepower. Such analysis also finds prudence on the basis of a fact known well over a period of time that the Chinese encroachments are often in the strength of a company to a battalion.

In the backdrop of the above analysis, it would be appropriate to withdraw the ITBP from the Indo-Tibet border and allow only the army to man it. It is relevant to quote our former Army Chief, Gen Shankar Roychowdhury, who in a discussion during the inaugural seminar of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies was emphatic in stating that he did not visualise the army ever being withdrawn from the Indo-Tibet border.²

Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan Borders: Amalgamation of ITBP and SSB—a Proposal

Conforming to the recommendation of withdrawal of the ITBP from the Indo-Tibet border, it is worth considering the amalgamation of the SSB with the ITBP, and the newly organised border force should appropriately be given the responsibility of policing the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders. It is well known that the Pakistan-based militant groups have used the Nepalese territory to infiltrate into India and similar activity is also indulged in by the Maoist rebels as well. As for Bhutan, various insurgent groups operating in the country's northeastern region have taken advantage of the open border and use the Bhutanese territory as sanctuary.

The proposed border police may be designated as the Northern Border Police (NBP) and amendments to the treaty obligations with these countries may be necessary, in that, trans-border movement should only be permitted through the designated points instead of the present open border arrangements. Policing of this border remains under the aegis of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Indo-Pak and Indo-Bangladesh Borders: One Border-One Force Principle Violated

As stated earlier, Pakistan and Bangladesh are now two separate countries and on the basis of the concept of the one-border-one force, as propounded in the GoM committee recommendations, a separate force should be designated for each of these two borders. In this backdrop, the GOM recommendations are not complete. In the recommendations, the GOM Committee seems to have found an alibi in approving two Additional director generals of police (Addl DGPs) within the BSF itself, one each to be in charge of the Indo-Pak border and Indo-Bangladesh border respectively. The appointments of Addl DGPs were approved

without any increments in the establishment, the resultant effect of which is that the Addl DGPs are in place but drawing upon the manpower from the battalions that are already stressed for manpower.

An appropriate arrangement that needs to be in place is that the large unwieldy BSF that is stretched from Kargil to the Bangladesh borders be reorganised and deployed as under:

- The BSF should be split into two separate border forces: the BSF continues to be responsible for the Indo-Pak border and a separate border force, created as a consequence, may be designated the Eastern Frontier Rifles (EFR). A force with the same designation existed in the area earlier but its establishments were transferred to Pakistan with the designation changed to East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) and later with the emergence of Bangladesh, renamed as the now known Bangladesh Rifles (BDR).
- Both the Indo-Pak border and Indo-Bangladesh border should continue to be manned under the aegis of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The BSF deployment on the Line of Control (LoC), wherein its companies are interspersed among army battalions, should be terminated. The LoC should be manned exclusively by the army and the resources of the BSF diverted to maximise towards effective surveillance of the international border with Pakistan. In this manner, proper unity of command will be ensured.

Summary of Recommendations

Thus far, the proposals put forth may be summarised as:

- The Indo-Tibet border and the LoC that separates the rightfully Indian province of Kashmir from the illegally Pakistan-held part of Kashmir, should be manned exclusively by the army under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence.
- The Indo-Myanmar border to be manned by the Assam Rifles as already put in place. It may be prudent to have an expert debate on whether jurisdiction of this border should be with the MoD or the MHA.
- The Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders should be assigned to a proposed newly created Northern Border Police (NBP) that is recommended to be organised by amalgamating the ITBP and SSB. The international border with these countries should be manned under the aegis of the MHA.
- The BSE, as presently organised, should be split as the BSF and EFR. The BSF continues to man the Indo-Pak border under the aegis of the MHA but it

should be relieved of deployment on the LoC. Such an arrangement is conducive towards ensuring unity of command and thereby greater efficiency in managing the Indo-Pak border.

- The newly created force out of the BSF, that is the EFR, should be assigned exclusively to the Indo-Bangladesh border under the aegis of the MHA.

Improving upon the Command and Control Organisational Structures and Evolving Mission Statements for the Border Forces

Evolving proper mission statements for an organisation is essential so that mission objectives are correctly analysed and proper directives can be given towards the conduct of operations. On the basis of experience gained and that added through further conduct of operations, a compatible organisational structure can be evolved. Regretfully, our border forces have in most part developed on the basis of adhocism and the same continues.

In 2000-01, I had researched at the United Service Institution (USI) and the same was published under the title, *India's Land Forces, Structural Imperatives*. I had the benefit of service with the BSF during the period 1994-2000 and on the basis of that exposure, had devoted a chapter on the BSF³. Unlike the defence forces that have now evolved/or are working on their doctrines on the basis of the latest strategic perceptions and are structuring the organisations and updating their equipment on the basis of threat perceptions identified now and futuristic perceptions, our BSF, however, functions on the basis of doctrine/mission statement evolved by a Government of India Study Group, 1968. The directions given to this force are so confusing that it has ended up developing itself as a parallel army, sans the expertise! The training systems in the force are so directed as if the BSF is required to fight the Pakistan Army in 1971. On the basis of this very strange logic, the force has been saddled with an artillery arm equipped with obsolete equipment of the size of approximately seven regiments which find no place in the prime function of surveillance and security of international borders.

India's para-military forces should not be just duplicating the functions of the army. Such an approach does not yield productivity towards enhancing national security but instead becomes detrimental to it by adding wasteful expense and fatigue to its personnel.

The budget for maintaining one artillery regiment is assessed as approximately Rs 16 crore per annum and in this backdrop, approximately Rs 128 crore is spent on maintaining the artillery arm for the BSF of which there is no productive outcome from this cost input.

We now have an economist heading our Ministry of Home Affairs; hopefully he would address the issue to curb such wasteful expenditure.

Our para-military forces should not be just duplicating the functions of the army as such an approach does not yield productivity towards enhancing national security but instead becomes detrimental to it by adding wasteful expense and fatigue to its personnel. As for the border forces, national security interests are certainly enhanced and furthered if they increase the ratio of interceptions of unauthorised crossings on the international borders. In the context of the threat perceptions identified at the beginning of this brief, a common mission statement for all border forces could emerge as:

Ensure effective surveillance and security of assigned international border so as to intercept and deny unauthorised trans-border traffic.

The above statement is comprehensive enough to:

- Provide proper direction towards conduct of operations.
- Suggest development of a compatible organisational structure.
- Enable innovation/research towards evolving inputs of technology so as to give greater effectiveness in the conduct of operations.

Border Management Organisation at the Apex Level and Deployment of Border Forces

The concept of one border-one force is well augmented by applying the principle of unity of command in respect of the border forces operating under the aegis of the MHA. Further, the GOM report recommends setting up of a separate department for border management,⁴ the requirement of which was further accentuated with the occurrence of 26/11. Ideally, instead of deploying another bureaucratic layer above the directors general of various border forces, the same could well be developed with the infrastructure of the Directorate General BSF, our largest border force, providing the infrastructure and staff. The Directorate General BSF should, thus, be upgraded to an establishment headed by an officer who may appropriately be designated as the controller general border forces and the under-mentioned border forces thence be placed under his direct operational and administrative control

with the specific border assigned, and their command elements, in turn, to be located as:

Designation of the Border Force	Border Assigned	Location of the Director General
Border Security Force (BSF)	Indo-Pak Border	Jalandhar (Punjab)
Eastern Frontier Rifles (EFR)	Indo-Bangladesh Border	Kolkata (West Bengal)
Northern Border Police (NBP)	Indo-Nepal & Indo-Bhutan Borders	Lucknow (UP)
Assam Rifles	Indo-Myanmar Border	Shillong (Meghalaya)

The proposed arrangement as placed above, gives a clear delineation of responsibilities, and the principle of unity of command permeates from the controller-general border forces at the apex to the directors general at the operational level who are now assigned the responsibility of an international border with one country only. The concerned directors general, instead of remaining ensconced in Delhi are now deployed in the assigned region, and thereby better placed to plan and direct operations in the field more effectively and thereby, appropriate resources more judiciously.

An exception may be accepted as for placing the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders with a single agency. The international border with Bhutan being restricted in length, a separate border force may not be cost-effective. Also, there is a large movement of persons between these two countries via the Indian territory, thus, a single agency manning these borders is better placed to resolve the issues that may arise in consequence.

Organisational Structure at the Functional Level

This is one important area that remains neglected. I am tempted to quote Gen Sir Walter Walker from his biography, *Fighting General*.⁵ "Services should be organised from the front to the rear." He has emphasised upon the need to accord priority to focus upon the establishments that will be engaging in direct combat with the enemy. In the case of our border guarding forces, it is appropriately the rifle company which has to sustain surveillance over a prolonged period on a permanent basis, whether there is a war or not. Border guarding duties, therefore, demand a manpower intensive establishment at

the activity level of a rifle company and below, and a sense of urgency needs to be shown towards inputs of technology at this level so as to augment human efficiency.

Our rifle companies are modelled on the basis of experience gained in World War II when the sub-units at this level functioned as cohesive outfits and deployed in short intense actions as part of their battalion's assigned tactical operation. As a consequence, the companies/battalions were either mauled severely after which they were probably re-raised or when successful with less casualties, were pulled back to a comparatively safer areas in the vicinity of battle zone for a brief rest and recuperation. The company strength determined around that time in the bracket of 120-130 has generally remained constant and our para-military forces (PMFs) or the central police organisations (CPOs) have also maintained the manpower close to this number only.

However, the strain upon the manpower is greatly felt in the present times when prolonged surveillance is to be maintained on the international borders and the Line of Control and thus, there is a positive need to augment the manpower base at the activity level of company and below. I have the case study of the BSF from the project study quoted earlier. The USI project study authored by me as a consequence of research, recommended a rifle company strength of 205 all ranks, that is, to include an in-built leave reserve of 20 per cent so that even if, at any time, say up to 35 per cent strength is away on leave or courses, close to 130 personnel are still present in the company to ensure efficiency in the conduct of operations. There are lessons for the army as well in this approach as its battalions are deployed over prolonged periods along the Line of Control in the counter-insurgency operations and in the peace-keeping operations under the aegis of the United Nations. In all these operations, a larger strength for a rifle company is sought and felt necessary.

The sixth company in the battalion will be the Headquarter Company that is organised to provide the command and control to include communications, and administrative support.

Observations

Ideally, a battalion of the border forces should be organised into five rifle companies that are structured as recommended above and there is no need to equip these forces with supporting weapons like mortars and artillery as in the prevailing arrangements. Borders forces should be organised as lightly armed

scout forces with good foot mobility. Instead of frittering the budget on maintaining an artillery arm, threat perceptions and their deployments thereof would suggest equipping these forces with hand-held image intensifiers, battlefield surveillance radars (BFSR), ground sensors and state-of-the-art communication equipment on a much larger scale.

The five rifle companies proposed in this brief may ideally be employed in the following manner:

- Three rifle companies deployed on the surveillance of the IB.
- One rifle company as reserve which can increase surveillance of a segment of the border on the basis of intelligence inputs or deploy quick reaction teams (QRTs).
- One rifle company dedicated to an uninterrupted eight-week schedule of refresher training.

Human surveillance to the extent of saturating the borders through physical deployment of personnel should first be ensured and thence the technology appropriated towards enabling early warning, thereby augmenting the efficiency of human surveillance.

A report of incessant infiltration by the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) based militant groups across the Line of Control in J&K, despite the location of ground sensors, suggests failure of attempts towards substituting human surveillance with technology.⁶ Therefore, human surveillance to the extent of saturating the borders through physical deployment of personnel should first be ensured and thence the technology appropriated towards enabling early warning, thereby, augmenting the efficiency of human surveillance.

Thus, recommending an increased strength at the activity level of a rifle company is primarily to ensure effective human surveillance in which balance must be ensured as well by retaining one company as reserve to increase surveillance or effect interceptions through employment of quick reaction teams when the local commander so deems.

Presently, in some border forces, battalions are organised into six or even seven companies with an authorised strength of close to 120 in each company. Experience shows that 35 to 40 per cent strength remains away on leave, courses or other forms of temporary duties. This leaves only around 65 all ranks in the

company, thereby, weakening the activity level of a rifle platoon to a mere 18 all ranks!

Six or seven companies with small functional strength available in platoons would be detriment for the effective surveillance of the IB. Further, six or seven companies would stretch the span of control of the battalion commander at the cost of effectiveness. It is advisable, therefore, to experiment with five companies per battalion with increased manpower base of 205 all ranks for each rifle company.

The company structure for all border forces should be standardised as recommended and it is in this context that I had stated in the beginning of this paper that mere adding the numbers will not suffice, as in the approach presently adopted towards manpower deployment, there is wasteful diversion and the same may tend to get compounded with the increased manpower becoming available.

Notes

1. GOM Report, Para-5.12, p. 61.
2. Army Vision- 2020 – a CLAWS publication recording the proceedings of the Inaugural Seminar, March 2004, p. 268.
3. USI Project Study, *India's Land Forces, Structural Imperatives* (Manas Publications, 2003), Chapter 3, Section-2.
4. GOM Report, Para-5.11, p. 61.
5. Tom Pocock, *Fighting General*, biography of Gen Sir Walter Walker (Collins,1973), Chapter 7, p. 221.
6. TN Ashok, *Strategic Affairs*, 15 April 2009, pp. 44-45.