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Intelligence agencies have to be accountable to the Executive. Otherwise, there will be no secrecy in their functioning. Without effective secrecy, there cannot be clandestine collection of intelligence having a bearing on national security. Nowhere in the world ---not even in the much cited US--- is the executive not primarily responsible for the effective functioning of the clandestine agencies.

2. However, in an increasing number of democracies, the Executive voluntarily shares with the legislature part of the responsibility for monitoring the performance of the secret agencies to ensure their competence to protect national security and to prevent wrong-doings.
3. In the US, the Executive and the Congress negotiate from time to time the ground rules for sharing this responsibility. The ground rules are so designed that in the anxiety to provide for accountability, the capability of the agencies to function as the clandestine arm of the State is not blunted.
4. The US Congress now has the following powers in respect of the agencies of the intelligence community:
 - To satisfy itself regarding the professional suitability of the heads of the agencies. The Senate Intelligence Oversight Committee goes into the suitability of designated heads and has to confirm their appointment.
 - To go into the overall budgetary allocations for different agencies and satisfy itself that correct national security priorities are observed in making the allocations. The Congress does not, however, go into allocations for individual clandestine operations. For example, the

Congressional Oversight Committees decide whether allocations made for monitoring nuclear developments in North Korea are adequate and appropriate, but cannot go into how the allocations are utilized on individual operations.

- To examine the intelligence produced by the agencies to satisfy itself that they adequately meet the national security needs.
- To enquire into instances of wrong-doing by the intelligence agencies.

5. The Executive and the two Houses of the Congress decide for themselves as to how they will exercise their shared responsibility without encroaching on each other's turf. The culture of bipartisanship in the US facilitates decisions relating to intelligence agencies being taken by the Executive and the two Parties in the Congress in continuous consultation with each other. Congressional leaders exercise their shared responsibility in such a manner as not to weaken national security.

6. The time has come to consider the introduction in the Indian intelligence community the concept of shared responsibility between the Executive and the Parliament for monitoring the performance of the intelligence agencies. Certain difficulties will arise in this regard which have to be addressed first:

- In India, we still do not have the concept of an intelligence community functioning as an organic whole. Each agency functions as an autonomous unit.
- Our intelligence agencies were set up under executive orders and not through an act of Parliament. Unless there is an act of Parliament formalizing the existence and functioning of the agencies, the question of a parliamentary role will remain vague
- There is no bipartisan culture in India. We have a multiplicity of political parties and coalitions. How to lay the ground rules under which a Parliament with a plethora of parties will play a role in monitoring the performance of the agencies? The more the parties involved in monitoring the performance of the agencies the less will be the secrecy. The concept of a national security culture has not evolved in our political class. Consequently, there will always be attempts by different parties to embarrass each other than to strengthen the intelligence community.

7. While I have always been a strong advocate of giving Parliament a role in monitoring the performance of the agencies, before this can be done the issues mentioned above have to be resolved through multi-party consensus. While the US model may not suit India, the British model can be considered for adoption with suitable changes and safeguards.

8. In the British model, the Prime Minister continues to play the leadership role in deciding the ground rules for joint Executive-Legislature monitoring of the performance of the agencies. Under the British political culture, the political parties do not challenge the primacy of the Prime Minister in matters relating to the intelligence agencies.

9. If we have to introduce the system in India, the political parties have to accept the primacy of the Prime Minister in matters relating to the secret agencies and the Prime Minister and the ruling coalition have to concede that the time has come to give the Parliament a role in this matter.

10. Once there is a gentlemen's agreement on this, the nuts and bolts can be decided through joint consultations.

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