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Kargil Committee Report and Intelligence

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Kargil Committee Report has evoked some emotional bursts of criticism. Yet, it has performed a yeoman service to the cause of Indian Intelligence. Never before the handicaps of the Indian Intelligence have been officially revealed to the public or a convincing case made out for urgent reforms. No outsider has been allowed in the past to look penetratingly into its ethos, culture, workstyles and capabilities or to prepare a report card on its performance. The Committee was permitted only a restricted peep but it has come up with a sound analysis of the state of Indian Intelligence.

Intelligence establishments should not remain closed societies forever. Like any other government department inadequacies and shortcomings plague them also. While secrecy is essential for their operations, a false doctrine of secrecy is not in the interest of the nation. Sunshine and a fresh breath of air are necessary to prevent stagnation and stunted growth. Application of certain standards of transparency and accountability will do them a world of good.

Western Intelligence establishments have been practising these virtues for quite some time. The many memoirs published there provide an index of the depth and pervasiveness of this phenomenon. Since 1948, the US Intelligence has been investigated by 12 Commissions, 7 Congressional and 5 Presidential. The profiles and charters of all the major intelligence organisations like the CIA and NSA of the USA and MI5, MI6 and CGHQ of the UK are public knowledge, being governed by the enactments of the concerned legislatures. Appropriate mechanisms have been set up by Law or executive directions at different levels for independent oversight.

Oversight and outside enquiries have not weakened these organisations insofar as their real purposes are concerned. After every such exercise, they emerged stronger and more effective, having been purged off debilitating weaknesses or practises and with more refined

procedures in place for future conduct. The reports of the CIA, despite its ups and downs, remain the main bulwark of US national security policies.

The Kargil report identifies many systemic flaws of the Indian Intelligence, such as absence of proper co-ordination, of a national pool of intelligence, of procedures which could focus on the flaws and initiate corrective action, or of a pyramidal structure of assessment and management. The failures of Kargil can be traced to these weaknesses. The real responsibilities of failure in Kargil truly lies on those at various levels of national security management whose business it was to exercise continuing monitoring functions to identify the requirements, shortcomings and obstructions but who, unfortunately, did not do so.

In-house efforts to carry out reforms get defeated. In 1988-89 a major effort was mounted to give a new face to the R&AW. Success was achieved in getting the scheme cleared by all the key departments including Personnel, Expenditure and Finance. Certain entrenched interests, however, had the final papers intercepted while they were in transit to the PMO, and lost. Soon, a new Govt. was in office, which, predictably, had no desire to do anything in the matter. The reforms which the Kargil Committee recommends will not see the light of the day unless high powered bodies are structured to navigate them to their logical end.

While, thus, the Kargil Committee scores on the point of highlighting the organic weaknesses of the Indian Intelligence apparatus and the National Security Management process, it does not cover itself with glory when it holds R&AW principally responsible for the total surprise of Pakistani presence in Kargil sector. Its expectations from intelligence do not belong to the world of reality. The truth is that intelligence can never present a complete picture. Many vital pieces remain in the region of unknowability. Nobody deserves to be guillotined for the factor of unknowability. An alert user fills up the gap by continuous probing and imaginative assessments, always with an eye on the worst case scenario. The Report acknowledges that this process did not function in Kargil. If blame is indeed to be dished out, whose is the greater blame?

The Pundits of nuclear theology in the country accept the American belief that nuclear armed adversaries never cross the borders. Could the Pundits ever believe before Kargil that it would occur? A similar charity needed to be shown to the Intelligence apparatus. The Kargil report states that practically no one believed a war like situation could develop across those dreary heights. The blame thus belongs to the long prevailing mindset of those in India whose business it was to keep an open mind.

The case against R&AW is built on its inability to identify the induction of two Bns. in the FCNA region after Oct. 98, to augment the 13 Bns. whose presence had been reported, and the forward deployment of two of these between April 98 and Feb. 99. The objectivity of this case has to be tested against R&AW's total reading of the orbats (Order of Battles) of the Pak defence forces. A correct reading of 90% of the orbat is considered a first rate performance in the intelligence world. A judgement going by mere statistics does not therefore constitute a valid finding.

Many quarters in the country have misgivings that the committee was looking for a scapegoat and in its wisdom chose R&AW for the role, perhaps being certain that the R&AW's self imposed discipline of silence will not be violated. It is gratifying that the Government seems to have gone by the yardsticks of truth and objectivity. Their decision not to release the entire report to the public is also praiseworthy. The biggest beneficiary of the full release would have been Pakistan which would then be in a position to assess fairly accurately how well and where it has been penetrated into by the Indian intelligence.

A.K.Verma

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(Mr. A.K.Verma is a former Secretary of Cabinet Secretariat.)

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