INTELLIGENCE, STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT, AND DECISION PROCESS DEFICITS

The Absence of Indian Learning from Crisis to Crisis

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There is an apocryphal tale frequently shared by retired Pakistani intelligence officials with their Indian counterparts about the Pakistani decision-making process that epitomizes the Indian perspective on strategic choices made in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.[1] Years after the 1999 Kargil War, India's intelligence community was still speculating whether the Pakistani civilian government had known of the Pakistan Army's plans to invade Kashmir when a former Pakistani intelligence chief told his Indian counterpart the "real" story at a Track 2 meeting. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif ostensibly did not know about his army chief's plans to occupy the heights of Kargil. However, as the tale goes, Sharif did let the army know that if they happened to be planning to march on from Kargil to Srinagar, the summer capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, he would be happy to accompany them.

Despite being on very different sides of the civil-military coin, India and Pakistan exhibit similar pathologies when it comes to national security decision-making in crises. In Pakistan, it is the historic civil-military divide that often enables, complicates, and intensifies crisis management in an already very complex South Asian rivalry. The imbalance in Pakistan's civil-military relations since abolishing the constitution in 1953 has exacerbated misperceptions about the center of control, threats and intentions, and escalation sensitivity, which have distorted signaling and appropriate response calibration during crises. What is underappreciated is that the byzantine and convoluted architecture of India's national security decision-making process has also contributed to difficulties in South Asian crisis management. Effective crisis management hinges on effective intelligence on the actors at play, strategic assessment of objectives and capabilities, and internal and external communication. These processes of intelligence, assessment, and communication situated within a broader architecture of national security decision-making can have profound effects on the quality of a state's preparation for and successful management of crises.[2]

1. Author's interview with A.S. Dulat, Delhi, April 14, 2016.

2. Risa Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3.

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This essay investigates such security processes to evaluate how India has handled various crises in its bilateral relationship with Pakistan — a relationship largely defined by security since its inception in 1947. Whereas in Pakistan the military has a dominant influence on India-Pakistan relations, in India it is the intelligence community. India's history of crisis management has been shaped by successes and failures of the Indian intelligence apparatus and its processes. The failures to obtain or process accurate intelligence, produce strategic assessments for effective responses, and clearly control messages between crisis management actors and domestic and international audiences are vulnerabilities that have not been addressed in the decades since the intelligence breakdowns that led to the 1962 India-China War. Responses to these failures — barring the slew of committees created after the 1999 Kargil War — have been unimaginative and ultimately have not addressed the Indian intelligence community's systemic failures. Intelligence shortcomings have been re-highlighted nearly every decade, including during the prolonged attack during the 2008 Mumbai crisis (26/11). The most recent crises, such as the 2016 Uri attack on a military camp that led to the deaths of 19 Indian soldiers, show that some of these systemic failures continue to evade solutions. There is a lack of processes, accountability, dissemination, and analysis.

The first section of this paper revisits some of these major bilateral crises to examine the role played by Indian intelligence. I identify several interacting strands of intelligence problems: intelligence collection (resources and technology), bureaucratic coordination, and intelligence analysis (separating the signal from the noise). An element of each type of these intelligence-related failures is present in every crisis, but highlighting the dominant type(s) in each episode enables closer study of the nature of the intelligence reform necessary. In section two, I consider the role of political and military strategic assessment and decision-making by principals during a crisis. In past India-Pakistan crises, confusion over objectives, capabilities, and roles has hindered strategic assessments. The third section discusses the dynamics of message control during a

crisis by considering how civil and military leaders, together with the media, disseminate information to domestic and international audiences. Clear, centralized message control has at times bolstered Indian management of past crises. However, more often the lack of an effective government communication strategy for crises has ensured an ad hoc decision-making process-driven in part by muddled and divided messaging.

As each episode is unique, context is critical for analyzing failures in past Indian crisis management. It is easy to draw erroneous conclusions and lessons from a crisis by failing to consider a larger perspective that includes history as well as dynamics particular to specific crises. Each crisis has to be understood within the larger framework of past crises and their management and resolution over time. To that end, media and scholarly analysis in this study is supported by several interviews I conducted with high-level government officials who served during critical crises, overseeing and participating in (1) intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination, (2) strategic assessment and decision-making, and (3) the processes of extrapolating lessons and developing new policies. This essay assesses the challenges in Indian management of bilateral India-Pakistan crises and highlights both the consistent failure to learn lessons and the need for reform to create a more process-driven crisis management model.

Intelligence Challenges: Collection, Analysis, and Coordination

A review of the long history of Indian intelligence failures illustrates the need for major systemic reform to achieve effective future crisis management. In particular, three key interlinked intelligence failures have occurred at different levels. Effective intelligence collection is often a result of poor resources or technology. Failures related to analysis of incoming intelligence also emerge when there is trouble separating the signal from the noise — deciphering what information is credible and critical for understanding the crisis at hand. Finally, the large and many bodies involved in crisis management — both within the government and military and between the lower and higher ranks within institutional bodies — have consistently suffered from poor coordination on intelligence gathering and analysis.

Independent India's first major intelligence failure came in 1961-62, an episode highlighting both poor coordination and collection processes. By the time China's People's Liberation Army crossed the McMahon Line that divides Tibet from India's Arunachal Pradesh, India had found itself in the middle of its first serious interstate crisis. New Delhi's intelligence breakdowns and inability to adequately predict an attack led to the first major reorganization of India's intelligence community.[3] However, that organization failed to comprehensively

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3. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), *A Case for Intelligence Reforms in India* (New Delhi: IDSA, 2012); and "Intelligence Failure: No Lessons Learnt from 1962 War," *The Times of India*, March 20, 2014.

address the structures and levers of crisis and conflict management and mitigation that India has faced since. There were incremental gains and capacity building, but neither amounted to the systemic changes expected after the failure of 1962.

Prior to the 1961-62 crisis, Indian Army Commander of Central Command Lt. Gen. S.P.P. Thorat virtually predicted the Chinese invasion, including details on where China would attack and how much time it would take to carry it out. However, his assessment failed to go beyond Army Headquarters. Meanwhile, the political leadership, fed by faulty or inadequate intelligence, continued to make disastrous strategic decisions. The "forward policy" of creating Indian Army posts well beyond the McMahon Line, as well as beyond known Chinese positions, was a central strategy for the political leadership. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) — then the sole agency tasked with gathering intelligence internally as well as externally — validated and supported this strategy. The relationship between then IB Chief B.N. Mullick and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was a key element, as both men worked quite closely to formulate this policy.[4] Throughout the episode, poor coordination between intelligence and policy actors ensured flawed crisis management and policy-making decisions.

U.S. presence in the region added a layer of complexity to this conflict, as the CIA was already playing a role in China. While it had two divisions directly involved with operations in China, they were not in sync. This lack of coordination undermined U.S. support of the Tibetan resistance movement, ensuring its failure.[5] This covert activity was by all available accounts known to the Indian leadership, but New Delhi continued to ignore it as a factor in its bilateral relationship with Beijing. However, the Chinese leadership suspected India of being an active participant in these activities and precipitated its plans to teach India a lesson.[6]

Until Chinese troops walked through the rudimentary Indian defenses in Ladakh in the west and Arunachal Pradesh in the east, the Indian intelligence community was completely unaware of Chinese intent and the extent to which the crisis could unfold. Failure to subsequently recognize these systemic fault lines would lead to New Delhi's perpetual reactive mode for future crises and conflicts — the possible exception being the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.

Comparing the events of the pre-1962 India-China War with those preceding the 1999 Kargil War reveals similar systemic gaps in bureaucratic coordination. Just as the military exercise conducted by Lt. Gen. Thorat in March 1960 revealed the Chinese capabilities and strategy to invade India,[7] a similar exercise

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4. For differences between the CIA's South Asia and Far East Division on support to the Tibetan resistance against the Chinese, see Bruce Riedel, *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA, and the Sino-Indian War* (New Delhi: Harper Collins India, 2015), 38-39, 131.

5. For a look at the CIA's support of the Tibetan resistance, see Riedel, *JFK's Forgotten Crisis*; and Mikel Dunham, *Buddha's Warriors* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

6. For example, see John W. Garver, "China's Decision for War with India in 1962," in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 86-130.

7. See Shiv Kunal Verma, *1962: The War That Wasn't* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2016), 38-41.

was conducted by the Indian Army's Jammu and Kashmir-based Northern Command. The findings of this latter exercise predicted a covert Pakistani invasion of the upper reaches of Kargil and its surrounding areas. However, the prescient results of this exercise did not reach the apex military or political leadership, ensuring that lessons learned were never implemented. In addition to information failing to move from lower to higher levels, two other critical factors contributed to India's inability to anticipate the infiltration by Pakistani troops into the heights of Kargil that overlook a strategic highway in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

First, the military was overtly focused on low-intensity conflict instead of overt military incursions; it is difficult to see something you are not looking for.[8] Involved in domestic actions for nearly a decade, the military had become focused primarily on counterinsurgency operations. The prospect of conventional war had receded, and domestically deployed infantry units were well-equipped and prepared to take on raging armed militants within the state, with battalion commanders focused on getting more "kills." This impacted the posture and training of the military units, eventually allowing the Pakistani military to stage a major surprise.[9]

Second, there was a major early intelligence failure to adequately read and analyze warning signals.[10] Like in 1962, India's intelligence community failed to comprehensively appreciate accumulating strands of information. There was intelligence about the Pakistani military buying snow boots in large numbers, as well as sightings of Pakistani irregulars made by local shepherds. At one point, then IB Director Shyamal Dutta reportedly sent across a signed letter to the army chief raising concerns about intruders in Kargil.[11] A signed letter from the IB chief is traditionally considered a rare occurrence only done when the chief is convinced about the seriousness of the intelligence input and its implications.

The military has a different version of the events preceding the Kargil War, suggesting that conflicting information flows made separating critical intelligence signals from the "noise" difficult. Then Director General of Military Operations Lt. Gen. N.C. Vij had received an assessment from the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), India's external intelligence agency, that there was no possibility of a war with Pakistan.[12] This created a situation where the military depended on bits and pieces of information that were at times contradictory.[13] When the first

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8. This is also a conclusion cited by the *Kargil Review Committee Report* as one of the causes for the failure to anticipate and interpret the infiltration. Government of India, *Kargil Review Committee Report,* February 23, 2000, available at the Nuclear Weapon Archive, http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/India/KargilRCB.html.

9. After the 2006 Lebanon War, similar concerns were raised about the Israeli Defense Force's capacity to fight hybrid or conventional war after decades of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.

10. See Gurmeet Kanwal, "Pakistan's Strategic Blunder in Kargil," *CLAWS Journa*l 4 (2009): 53-72.

11. See Saikat Datta, "The Lie Nailed," *Outlook,* May 22, 2006. This was confirmed by Ajit Doval, who was posted as the additional director of the Intelligence Bureau in Srinagar before the Kargil War and was behind the issuance of the letter to Army Headquarters 11 months before the intrusions were detected.

12. Author's interview with N.C. Vij, Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi, April 13, 2016.

13. Ibid.

intrusions were detected in May 1999, it was assumed by Army Headquarters in New Delhi that this was a normal infiltration bid. The first meetings of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) were inconclusive, and then Chief of Army Staff Gen. V.P. Malik was on a tour of Poland and continued his trip while the war started. By May 13 media reports had already confirmed the presence of Pakistani regulars, but inaccurate intelligence estimates continued to cause inaction at various levels of the government.

Another key intelligence failure during Kargil related to the method and source of the intelligence — collection was limited to a single source. The Kargil Review Committee, established by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's government soon after the war ended, believed that India's intelligence apparatus had failed. It pointed out that "the RAW facility in Kargil area did not receive adequate attention in terms of staff or technological capability."[14] Notably, it also pointed out that "In other words, the Indian threat assessment is largely a *single-track*[15] process dominated by RAW."[16] Clearly this indicated that not only was intelligence inadequate but also dominated by a single agency, leading to the failure to accurately predict Pakistan's plans for an asymmetric strategy to undermine Indian security interests. In fact, the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Defence noted in its 22nd report issued in July 2007 that "amidst these dramatic developments [to the external and internal threat environments India faced], the traditional structures and processes for the management of national security are under considerable stress."[17]

This lapse of intelligence at Kargil would not be the first that year. In December 1999, New Delhi faced a fresh crisis when an Indian Airlines flight (IC 814) from Kathmandu, Nepal, was hijacked. The IC 814 hijacking crisis was in part due to an intelligence collection failure. Just as the country prepared to celebrate Christmas, the aircraft took off from Kathmandu, landed in Amritsar, and then flew to Kandahar in Afghanistan via Lahore and Dubai. Not only did Indian intelligence fail to predict and prevent the hijacking, it also had no clarity about the hijackers for the first 48 hours.[18] The first information about the hijacking came from then IB Director Dutta, who informed Deepak Chopra, officer on special duty to the Deputy Prime Minister and Union Home Minister L.K. Advani. Though the government Crisis Management Committee activated, it was several hours into the first 48 hours before senior officials could figure out who to contact and where to meet.

The inability to process disparate strands of intelligence into a coherent and actionable narrative compounds the lack of intelligence problem. This issue was most visible when terrorists from the Pakistan-based group Lashkar-e-Taiba

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14. See paragraphs 13.31 and 13.40 of the *Kargil Review Committee Report*.

15. Author emphasis added.

16. See paragraphs 13.31 and 13.40 of the *Kargil Review Committee Report*.

17. Lok Sabha Secretariat, *22nd Report: 14th Lok Sabha Standing Committee on Defence* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2006-7).

18. Author's interview with Dulat. During the time of the hijacking, Dulat was the Secretary (R) in the Cabinet Secretariat (e.g., the head of R&AW).

(LeT) attacked Mumbai on Nov. 26, 2008.[19] The earliest intelligence reports issued on Aug. 7, 2006, mention LeT's plans to infiltrate *fidayeen* (suicide attackers) into India by sea. There were other alerts that were more specific between 2006 and 2008 — one as late as Nov. 11, 2008 — that predicted an imminent attack. The high-level committee set up by the Maharashtra Government to inquire into the failures during the attack summarized that "an overall assessment and proper analysis of these reports would have revealed a strong indication that some major terrorist action was being planned."[20]

Another alert was sent across by the IB on September 24 stating that the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel could be a possible target.[21] Despite the plethora of these inputs, there was no organizational pathology to coordinate and process the information together. While the IB sent across its reports, it did not coordinate its efforts with the Mumbai Police or seek its feedback. There seems to have been a complete lack of discussion on a possible response in case such an attack did take place. The central intervention force for terrorist attacks — the National Security Guard (NSG) — was never brought into the loop, and it had no plan for such an exigency until the attack started on the night of November 26.

As former National Security Advisor (NSA) Shivshankar Menon admitted,[22] no one managed to decipher the intelligence signals that were pouring in. As disjointed bits emerged, there was no effort to create a single task force that could track all the bits and piece together scenarios. Shortcomings in India's ability to effectively coordinate different government and military agencies in efforts at intelligence collection and analysis during crises continue to undermine bilateral crisis management. These front-end challenges were exacerbated by weakness in strategic assessments during the responsorial decision-making stages of crisis management.

Strategic Assessments

Even in the absence of intelligence failures, poor strategic assessment can arise involving deficits in information sharing, limited strategic coordination, gaps in competencies for national security, and ambiguity of authorization. Poor strategic assessments can intensify crises through misestimation of relative military capabilities and destabilizing strategies, neglect of political constraints, failure to convert political goals into military strategies, and obscured signaling that causes miscalculation by adversaries.[23]

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19. See Section I — Intelligence in (India), Government of India, *Report of the High Level Enquiry Committee (HLEC) on 26/11*, December 2009, 5-28, available at https://www.scribd.com/doc/179156650/Pradhan-Committee-Report-about-26-11-pdf.

20. Ibid.

21. See Paragraph 13, Ibid., 5.

22. See James Glanz, Sebastian Rotella, and David E. Sanger, "In 2008 Mumbai Attacks, Piles of Spy Data, but an Uncompleted Puzzle," *The New York Times*, December 21, 2014.

23. Brooks, *Shaping Strategy*, 6-9. These pages introduce the international implications of four types of failures in strategic assessment.

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All four of these strategic assessment failures have occurred in India during past bilateral crises. First, information deficits have led Indian leadership to be unclear on India's intelligence and force capabilities during different crises. Second — as a result of poor coordination between intelligence, military, and political agencies — considered response options were poorly calibrated. Third, Indian options were in fact limited by deficits in the capabilities, training, and preparation of different actors in the security forces and intelligence communities. Finally, strategic assessments suffered from a lack of clear organizational structure and delineated civil-military roles and authorities. Because of these challenges, perceived means have often driven Indian crisis management strategy instead of preconceived objectives and accurate capabilities assessments.

During the 1999 Kandahar hijacking, decision-makers overestimated military capabilities when planning India's response. As the Indian Airlines plane arrived at Kandahar in Taliban-held Afghanistan, the Crisis Management Group (CMG) met several times to discuss the available options to rescue the hostages. While a special forces raid was suggested, it was quickly dismissed as impractical. The force that was thought to be ideal for such an operation, the NSG, did not have the wherewithal, training, or orientation to carry out such an operation so far from home. The Indian Air Force (IAF) — crucial for this type of operation — was also clear that it lacked the right special operations-capable aircraft that could transport the troops and facilitate such a rescue. Clearly, an "Entebbe-like operation" as it was described during the meetings, was out of place.[24]

The other briefly suggested but quickly dismissed option was to conduct an IAF air strike from Iran. A strike, it was discussed, could divert and intimidate the Taliban and allow Indian troops to carry out a major evacuation. However, no one took the suggestion very seriously and everyone in the CMG started coming

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24. The Israelis carried out a rescue operation when Jewish hostages on board an Air France flight were taken as hostages to Entebbe, Uganda in 1974. The Israelis carried out a special forces raid and brought all hostages barring two back to Israel.

around to carrying out negotiations with the Taliban. The decision was aided by a breakthrough that helped the R&AW to obtain vital clues about the hijacking. Then State Commissioner of R&AW Hemant Karkare, an Indian Police Service officer on deputation to the external intelligence agency, was posted in Mumbai. Acting on a tip, he engineered a series of arrests that would unravel the plot and give the CMG the first clues about the hijackers.[25]

However, while this was crucial intelligence, it continued to support only one option for the CMG — a negotiation that could be pared down to a minimum exchange of prisoners with the hostages. A critical assessment of this crisis and a few other events that took place during Prime Minister Vajpayee's tenure show that strategic objectives were dictated by the limited options on the table. India's options were not first shaped by strategic government objectives. This trend continued through the major crisis that followed as the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh took over.

The attack on the Indian Parliament on Dec. 13, 2001, is a particularly interesting crisis to study because it led to the second formal mobilization of the Indian military after the Kargil War. Strategic assessment in the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis featured an overestimation of capabilities and a disconnect between military means and political ends. Within days of the attack the CCS decided to mobilize the military to launch a possible strike across the international border into Pakistan. While official records are not clear about what the objectives of Operation Parakram were, several key personalities close to the decision have given conflicting perspectives but agreed that the overall decision-making body seemed to be unclear about the strategic objectives for India's biggest mobilization since the 1971 war. Then Naval Chief Adm. Sushil Kumar is on record that the government did not have any stated political objectives for the mobilization under Operation Parakram, which hampered the military objectives.[26]

The confusion over the strategic objectives of Operation Parakram is not new. The Kargil War (Operation Vijay) saw similar differences between the highest decision-making bodies during the crisis. Political leaders limited military options by refusing to consider crossing the Line of Control (LoC). While it has been recorded that Prime Minister Vajpayee was against the crossing of the LoC during the Kargil War, his Cabinet colleague and deputy, Advani, has always been a proponent of "hot pursuit." A telling commentary by then Air Chief Marshal A.Y. Tipnis records that the prime minister was against any crossing by the Indian Armed Forces during the war. A briefing of the CCS on May 25, when the crucial decision was taken to allow the IAF to take out Pakistani targets in

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25. Author's interview with Dulat. Also, see Saikat Datta, "NIA's Malegaon U-Turn: Why Hemant Karkare Does Not Deserve to Die All Over Again," *Scroll.in*, May 14, 2016.

26. See "Op Parakram Was a Most Punishing Mistake: Ex-Navy Chief," *The Indian Express*, November 5, 2011. Also see "Operation Parakram after Parliament Attack Lacked Clear Objectives: Ex-Navy Chief Sushil Kumar," *The Times of India*, November 6, 2011.

Kargil, saw the prime minister reinforce his decision not to allow any crossings of the LoC.[27] However, Advani, as the union home minister — a position considered second only to the prime minister in the order of precedence — had always pushed for a "hot pursuit" line, which did not materialize when it could have served as a legitimate military strategy.[28] This also ensured that special forces were left with limited options, severely curtailing strategic special operations that could have ended the war much earlier.[29]

Poor strategic coordination within and between civilian and military bodies is another deeper malaise that leads to a lack of clear strategic objectives during a national exigency. More recent crises, such as the 2008 Mumbai crisis and the 2016 Pathankot attack involving a terrorist strike on an IAF base in Punjab, exemplified the inevitable crisis management breakdowns that ensue when the authorization process for decision-making is unclear. On both occasions, the indistinct delineation of roles among various agencies led to substantial confusion on the ground.

In 2008, as initial reports of a terrorist strike in Mumbai reached New Delhi, there was extensive confusion among key members of the security establishment and the then NSA M.K. Narayanan came under considerably criticism for being missing in action.[30] Narayanan's role in ensuring that the two principal intelligence agencies in India — the IB and the R&AW — had chiefs close to him has been criticized on several occasions.[31] It has also been pointed out that during his tenure he ensured that IB Director Ajit Doval (current NSA) could retire after a mere eight months to guarantee that Narayanan could appoint his former staff officer as the next chief.[32]

The way New Delhi handled the 2008 Mumbai crisis is indicative of the deeper systemic failures that guarantee repeating past mistakes in crisis after crisis. In many ways, this is symptomatic of the lack of professionals and meritocracy. As a case in point, the office of the NSA has drawn from people close to either the incumbent prime minister (Brajesh Mishra during the Vajpayee years) or the power center of the dominating political party (Narayanan during Prime Minister Singh's tenure). This has led to the NSA emerging as a power center within the Prime Minister's Office, accruing command over vast resources without any direct accountability to either the people, through Parliament, or to the ministries handling these sensitive issues.

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27. See A.Y. Tipnis, "Operation Safed Sagar," *Force Magazine*, October 2006, 12.

28. See Zafar Meraj and Ajith Pillai, "Hot Pursuit," *Outlook*, June 8,1998. Also see Advani's position subsequent to the war, where he would consistently raise the option of "hot pursuit": "Hot Pursuit Legitimate: Advani," *The Times of India*, October 9, 2001.

29. See Saikat Datta and P.C. Katoch, "Op Vijay: The Kargil Conflict," in *Indian Special Forces: The History of India's Special Forces*, ed. P.C. Katoch and Saikat Datta (New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, 2013). Also see "Army Planned Offensive Across LoC in January," *The Tribune* (India), December 24, 2002.

30. See Jitender Gupta, "Why M Sounds Better Than MK," *Outlook*, December 15, 2008.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

The challenges India faces to effective strategic assessment and the resulting crisis management failures become apparent to wider audiences — at home and abroad — through government and military communications as crises unfold.

Message Control and the Decision-making Process

Public communication can have a profound impact on crisis management. When different elements of both political and military leadership decide to release information during a crisis, they do so with specific objectives. In the past messages have been aimed with varying intensity at domestic Indian audiences, forces across the border in Pakistan, and the broader international community. Communication strategies during crises therefore affect public reactions and political pressures. The news media often serves as the tool for this information dissemination, but it sometimes also functions as the actual source of information while a crisis unfolds. As such, the media itself can function as a crisis dynamic.[33] State management failures and glitches in the decision-making process during past crises are in part attributable to poor message control. These failures, namely the spread of misinformation or prematurely released information, offer tactical advantages to enemies as events unfold in real time. Similarly, they can raise alarm or alternately a false sense of security amongst security forces or the public near an unfolding crisis. In past exigencies, India has used public communication in ways that both helped and hurt crisis management.

In January 2016, as terrorists crossed the Indo-Pakistan international border and attacked the IAF base at Pathankot, initial reports indicated that New Delhi was prepared to handle the unfolding crisis, but events would prove that institutional roles were unclear. A complement of commandos from the NSG had been airlifted to the base as a precautionary measure on the orders of the NSA. However, the role of the Ministry of Home Affairs in the management of the crisis was not clear. The ministry is the nodal agency for all internal security matters and directly controls the NSG, but the public statements from senior officials of the ministry revealed that it was not in the decision-making loop, leading to confusion about counterterrorism operations on ground. While the union home minister declared on the microblogging site Twitter that the country's terrorism operations were over, subsequent reports indicated ongoing firefights. The operation would continue for another 20 hours as ground forces continued to lay siege to a building believed to have housed two terrorists not accounted for in the initial estimates.

The embarrassment led to the union home minister deleting his tweets, but the disjointed management of the crisis would continue as criticism accumulated.

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33. See essay in this volume by Ruhee Neog, "Self-Referencing the News: Media, Policy-Making, and Public Opinion in India-Pakistan Crises."

Military veterans indicated the presence of battle-hardened troops and the army's special forces located within hours of the Pathankot air base, which had been ignored in favor of the NSG.[34] It was argued that the army's special forces could have conducted a swifter operation instead of rushing in the NSG, which was unfamiliar with the air base. However, this too has been disputed by those who observe that the NSG's operational leadership was familiar with the on-ground situation.

While debate on tactics continues, what is clear is that the crisis did not see the government function in unison. Reports suggested that the Ministry of Defence was not in the loop even though the air base was under its operational command.[35] This also left the army units largely out of the operation, while the Ministry of Home Affairs was also unaware of the unfolding ground operation. Like the IC 814 hijacking crisis in 1999, the central crisis management teams of the federal government remained disjointed and separated despite a decade of experience. Intelligence remained vague, and despite the proactive deployment of the NSG, the results were far from desirable. While the NSG operations lasted for over 60 hours during the 2008 Mumbai crisis, it took them a little over 48 hours to clear Pathankot. Clearly, the internal communication channels of the federal government had not improved in the intervening years, highlighting a concerning failure of institutional lesson learning.

However, a crisis is also an opportunity, and New Delhi has at times displayed remarkable alacrity at effectively controlling messages during national exigencies. The Kargil War is an example of India's technical intelligence capabilities and communications savvy: information was released to effectively send messages to domestic and international audiences. India intercepted a call between Gen. Pervez Musharraf and his Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Mohammed Aziz while on an official visit to China even as the Indian armed forces were assaulting Pakistani-held positions in Kargil.[36] The intercepted conversations became a major diplomatic tool quickly used to build world opinion against Pakistan and expose the role of its military in planning the operation.[37] In a major carefully coordinated diplomatic exercise, the tapes of the conversation were delivered to Prime Minister Sharif by R.K. Mishra, a former journalist who led a prominent think tank in New Delhi and was close to the Vajpayee administration, accompanied by Vivek Katju, then a joint secretary covering Pakistan in the Ministry

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34. For example, see Josy Joseph and Dinakar Peri, "Deploying NSG Instead of Army Was a Mistake: Experts," *The Hindu*, January 6, 2016.

35. See P.C. Katoch, "Our Inward Looking Policy Has Cost Us Dearly," *Rediff*, January 4, 2016; and P.C. Katoch, "Refurbishing Security — Something Cooking?" *Indian Defence Review*, January 16, 2016.

36. "Excerpts of Conversations between Gen Musharraf and Lt Gen Aziz," *Rediff*, June 11, 1999.

37. See Bruce Riedel, *American Diplomacy & the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2002). Riedel was present at the summit and gives an insider account. The U.S. intervention was significantly bolstered after the tapes were shared with the U.S. administration. Also see reports from India and Pakistan, "Clinton Advisor: Confusion Gripped Islamabad during Kargil Crisis," *Dawn*, October 23, 2006; and "Vajpayee Stood Firm during Kargil Conflict: Clinton Aide," *The Times of India*, May 19, 2002.

of External Affairs.[38] The reaction to the tapes followed expected lines and led to a major diplomatic coup for New Delhi. Having such clear proof to show an adversary as well as a broader public audience was invaluable to India's image at home and abroad.[39]

Sending the tapes to Pakistan and other key global leaders was a risky decision, ultimately driven by then NSA Brajesh Mishra,[40] who was also the principal secretary to Prime Minister Vajpayee. Mishra, a former Foreign Service officer, was in a unique position by the virtue of the twin positions held by him. As NSA, he had the intelligence agencies reporting to him, while his position as the principal secretary gave him proximity to the prime minister and therefore considerable political heft. This ensured that he had the clout to push through such a decision. While some analysts have debated the decision to release the intercepted tapes due to the erosion of some intelligence capabilities, the consensus has been that it was an unqualified success both internationally and domestically.

The decision-making process in India in the upper echelons of higher strategic management and communication is largely personality rather than process-driven. While principal personalities like Prime Minister Vajpayee, his deputy Advani, and NSA Mishra played a dominant role during the Kargil War and IC 814 crisis, it was left to the NSA Narayanan to take charge during the 26/11 terrorism attack on Mumbai (though he was criticized for being at a party even after the attacks had started in Mumbai).[41] Ostensibly, the CCS — comprised of the prime minister and his home, defense, finance and external affairs ministers — is the key decision-making body during any national exigency. The CCS gets support from the chiefs of the armed forces and the intelligence agencies when necessary.

However, this structure has not been process-driven and is usually dependent on the personalities holding the chair. As recent reports indicate, the Prime Minister's Office has emerged as the pre-eminent power on all issues related to security, strategic affairs, and foreign relations. The same trend is now visible in policy handling and crisis management when it comes to recent events like the 2016 Pathankot or Uri crises and their responses via coordinated surgical strikes in late September 2016.[42] The last two years have seen Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally leading efforts to improve India's external relations with the major powers. However, whether his direct stewardship has translated into strategic gains remains to be seen, and his failure to garner favorable responses

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38. Pranay Sharma, "Delhi Hits Sharif with Army Tape Talk," *The Telegraph* (India), July 3, 1999.

39. Suzanne Goldenberg, "'Barbarism' Insult Fired at Pakistan," *The Guardian*, June 11, 1999.

40. Author's interview with an anonymous former Cabinet minister.

41. Shishir Gupta, "What Went Wrong? The Inside Story," *The Indian Express*, December 26, 2008. Also see "'It's Not Your Fault,' Rice Told NSA Narayanan Post-26/11," *Deccan Herald*, October 28, 2011.

42. See Saikat Datta, "Behind the Scenes: How India Went About Planning the 'Surgical Strikes' after the Uri Attack," *Scroll.in*, September 29, 2016.

on India's bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group in June 2016 is an indication that this strategy may not have worked well.[43]

This trend indicates that communication by key government stakeholders as well as external participants such as the media has not been effective enough. The multiple mistakes during the Pathankot crisis — such as erroneous tweets from the union home minister declaring the operation over even while firefights continued — are a clear indication of the lack of adequate internal communication as mentioned earlier in this essay. These communication failures highlight the disconnect between forces on ground and the Ministry of Home Affairs in Delhi, which has the overall responsibility for internal security. The pronouncements from Delhi and the disjointed reports from Pathankot led to a dangerous cycle. Forces on the ground continued with the operation even though four of the militants had already been neutralized. Premature communications over operational completion by the Union Home Ministry, displayed on social networking sites such as Twitter, added to the confusion and led to needless extension of operations.

However, the role of the media, especially during crises, has also come under some unfair scrutiny and criticism. For instance, the live coverage of the NSG's operations during the 26/11 attack by LeT was severely criticized by the Supreme Court.[44] However, it was then Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil who gave an interview to several TV news channels in the early hours of November 27 that he was flying to Mumbai with a complement of 250 commandos from the NSG, taking away any element of surprise that could have benefitted rescue operations.[45] This failure to effectively manage information during the 2008 Mumbai crisis has largely escaped scrutiny. Similar issues in 1999 were raised by the Kargil Review Committee, and the need for an effective communication strategy for exigencies has been discussed on various occasions.[46] However, beyond utilizing statutory powers to delay live coverage of terrorism attacks and hostage rescue missions, no formal plans have been implemented so far.[47]

Conclusion: Need for Process-driven Management

This essay illustrates that critical failures of Indian crisis management and defense stem from a lack of process-driven intelligence, assessment, and communication. The fact that some organizations set up after one crisis are subsequently

43. Yashwant Sinha, "After NSG Mess, We're Told 'Failure *Acche Hain*,'" *NDTV,* July 4, 2016. Yashwant Sinha is a Bharatiya Janata Party leader and former finance and external affairs minister but was not included in the current National Democratic Alliance government. Also see former national security advisor in the Congress-led government's opinion on the Nuclear Suppliers Group bid, "M.K. Narayanan, "Pause for a Reality Check," *The Hindu,* July 4, 2016.

44. S. Ahmed Ali, "26/11 Attack: Media Pulled Up by Supreme Court for It's Role," *The Times of India*, August 31, 2012.

45. Nitin Gokhale, "26/11: Sheer Paralysis Gripped the Government," *Rediff*, November 26, 2014. Also see "Shivraj Patil Airbrushes 26/11 from His Autobiography," *The Times of India*, September 1, 2014.

46. Government of India, *Kargil Review Committee Report*.

47. Himanshi Dhawan, "Centre Bans Live Coverage of Anti-Terror Operations," *The Times of India*, March 24, 2015.

> This essay illustrates that critical failures of Indian crisis management and defense stem from a lack of process-driven intelligence, assessment, and communication.

changed after another crisis inhibits their ability to effectively function.[48] There is little discussion around the efficacy of different managing bodies or the specific purposes they serve. The limited discussions that have occurred have yielded few tangible outcomes. High-level political leaders stating intents to reform national security and make it more process-driven have repeatedly failed to produce change under various administrations.[49] These failures ensure that the decision-making process in the government and its impact on key stakeholders, both internal and external, remain an ad hoc process at best. Even though governments have changed several times over the crises reviewed in this essay, each national security exigency reveals the same fault lines and systemic failures. The lack of a cohesive and well-coordinated plan ensures that India will continue to repeat its past mistakes.[50]

In the United States, the failure of Operation Eagle Claw by U.S. special forces in their attempt to rescue diplomats and embassy staff from Iran led to a major overhaul of the Pentagon[51] and the creation of the U.S. Special Operations Command.[52] A similar overhaul of the U.S. intelligence community after 9/11 led to major reforms that were structured through the creation of the Office of Director of National Intelligence[53] and two structured "100 Day"[54] and "500 Day"[55] plans. By contrast, the reforms process in India has been restricted to

48. The National Security Advisory Board was created after the Kargil War as part of the reforms in higher security management. It was suspended after the National Security Advisory Board's term ended once Narendra Modi became prime minister. Since then, its exact role or efficacy has never been discussed publicly or in Parliament.

49. P. Chidambaram, "Intelligence Bureau Centenary Endowment Lecture: A New Architecture for India's Security" (lecture presented in New Delhi, December 23, 2009), http://www.mha.nic.in/hindi/sites/upload_files/mhahindi/files/pdf/HM-IB-Endowment231209.pdf. This is a case in point. His proposal to create a detailed process-driven security architecture fell apart subsequently and remains only on paper to date.

50. Devjyot Ghoshal, "Pathankot Strike: Why Isn't the Indian Govt Better at Handling Terror Attacks?" *Quartz*, January 3, 2016. Also see "Why India's Response to Pathankot Attack Was a 'Debacle,'" *BBC*, January 6, 2016.

51. The Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization of the Pentagon Act saw major reforms in the way the military would function during national emergencies. It is also worth reading the findings of the Adm. Holloway Commission that was set up after the failure of Operation Eagle Claw to investigate the causes of the debacle. The commission findings can be read at George Washington University's National Security Archive at, http://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//NSAEBB/NSAEBB63/doc8.pdf.

52. U.S. Special Operations Command was set up through the Nunn-Cohen Amendment to the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

53. For an overview of these reforms, see the Director of National Intelligence "History" page: https://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/history. Also see the 9/11 Commission Report, available at http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf and the "Intelligence Reform & Terrorism Prevention Act" at https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-108publ458/pdf/PLAW-108publ458.pdf.

54. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *100 Day Plan: Integration and Collaboration* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, July 27, 2007), https://fas.org/irp/dni/100-day-plan-followup.pdf.

55. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *500 Day Plan: Integration and Collaboration* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, October 10, 2007), https://fas.org/irp/dni/500-day-plan.pdf.

the Kargil Review Committee after the war in 1999, and there has been no major structural or comprehensive review since then. Many of the major recommendations from the committee are still pending, and a later commission — known as the "Naresh Chandra Task Force on National Security" — created by the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance government was discarded as soon as the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance government came to power in May 2014.[56] It appears that the only consistency in reforming India's moribund and bureaucracy-ridden security architecture remains ensuring that no comprehensive reform occurs.

The current administration under Prime Minister Modi has yet to address these systemic failures, though the need for institutional reform and building a process-driven approach has never been more acute. The eruption of violence in Kashmir in the summer of 2016 and the many injuries and blindings due to the excessive use of force by state security demonstrate this lack of strategy. The violence has only escalated and led to deeper crises rather than peace.[57] The fact that India's security agencies have not followed a data-driven approach for formulating policy further exacerbates the problem.

To address some of the key challenges highlighted in this essay, India needs to introduce meaningful reform to its higher security echelons. Some key recommendations for the reformation include:

- Creating processes with clear institutional roles and responsibilities during crisis scenarios. This has never been established and has been subjected to too many changes without any empirical evidence on efficacy. Institutional roles need to be reassessed and reoriented to address large gaps in current capabilities for managing crises.

- Addressing issues of accountability and establishing a clear delineation of responsibilities in intelligence reform. Accountability must be in terms of collection and dissemination of intelligence, while delineation must be a function of intelligence analysis and assessments.

- Ensuring policy making is data-driven, with data leading the way, rather than situating an appreciation. Projects created to address some of these issues, though inherently flawed, are classic examples of how decisions are taken without adequate data, leading to a largely reactive posture.[58]

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56. "Task Force on National Security Presents Report to PM," Press Information Bureau (India), Prime Minister's Office, May 23, 2012, http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=84437.

57. See the detailed data sheets maintained by the South Asia Terrorism Portal that tracks violent incidents in Jammu & Kashmir, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data_sheets/index.html.

58. Two projects are a case in point: The Crime and Criminal Tracking Networks and Systems project was created to link all the police stations across the country for real-time data sharing and coordination between different states. Separately, the federal government started the National Intelligence Grid project to connect 22 databases to ensure real-time big data analysis on intelligence inputs. Both projects have yet to deliver despite existing for over a decade. However, in the opinion of the author both projects are inherently flawed and will never deliver the results originally intended.

- Creating a clear, internally understood escalatory ladder and ensuring that all the escalation steps are geared to deliver optimally.

- Institutionally protecting intelligence assessments against groupthink by building key responsibility areas that are processed through sound and proven methodologies.

The reorganization of India's higher defense management, started after the Kargil War, continues to languish despite the lapse of nearly 16 years. Key appointments, such as that of the chief of defence staff, continue to elude political sanction. Recommendations for new institutional structures, such as the creation of a dedicated special operations command and a cyber command, have yet to take off, even though a pronouncement was made as recently as August 2017 by the union defence secretary at the Unified Commanders Conference in New Delhi. With the military seen as an integral part of the escalatory ladder, this lack of substantive reform continues to hamper decision-making for crisis management in India.