ORGANIZING FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Evaluating India's Experience in Three Case Studies

Shyam Saran

States are increasingly confronted with various unexpected emergencies that affect the welfare of their citizens. In liberal democracies such as India, the added challenge of intense media scrutiny often complicates the handling of crisis situations. Therefore, it is prudent to have institutional mechanisms such as a crisis management group in place to respond promptly and efficiently to crises and remain engaged until tensions recede to more manageable levels. Such mechanisms need well-rehearsed drills that can be implemented without delay and with designated officials and agencies preassigned their respective responsibilities. Additional officials/agencies may be brought in as needed. Having such mechanisms in place also ensures constant evaluation and learning. The absence of such mechanisms or bypassing them when situations arise may negatively impact appropriate crisis handling. It has also been seen that an overarching national security doctrine that could provide a template for a whole-of-government approach — something modern crises demand — is a fundamental prerequisite. This approach has so far been missing in India, leading to a pervasive reliance upon ad hoc means for dealing with crises.

This essay first unpacks India's systems and institutions of crisis management and then evaluates their role in three cases from India, one of crisis management success and two of crisis management failures. India successfully handled a hostage situation involving three Indian truck drivers in Iraq in August 2004 but employed incoherent and uncoordinated responses toward two other crises — one involving a major terrorist attack on India's commercial capital Mumbai in November 2008 and a later attack in January 2016 on an Indian Air Force base in Pathankot. The author selected these cases because he was personally involved in the first as India's foreign secretary and was a close witness during the Mumbai incident as part of the Prime Minister's Office. For this reason, there is substantial information provided for the first case, less for the second, and only anecdotal details in the third, as the author witnessed it from outside the government decision-making process. The essay distills several important shortcomings related to personnel, priorities, and governance revealed in the cases that need to be addressed. Finally, the essay reflects on the importance of

Ambassador Shyam Saran, Senior Fellow at the Center for Policy Research, is a former Foreign Secretary of India.

transparent evaluative assessments like the *Kargil Review Committee Report* and its continued relevance today for more effective Indian crisis management in the future.

Crisis Management System in the Indian State

The Indian state has a well-established crisis management system both at the central and state levels. At the center, there is a Crisis Management Group (CMG) headed by the Cabinet secretary, the senior-most civil servant in the country. The CMG has a standing membership that includes senior officials of key ministries, intelligence agencies, and armed and paramilitary forces. As foreign secretary, the author was invited to participate whenever there was an external dimension to an emerging threat or a crisis that unexpectedly erupted. Similar CMGs exist at the state level, where it is the chief secretary — the senior-most civil servant at the state level — who heads the group and whereto all key government functionaries are represented. In both cases, there may be additional functionaries or other senior officials from different ministries and agencies of the government that may get co-opted depending upon the nature of the crisis. For example, in case of an epidemic the head of the Directorate General of Health Services may be invited; if there is a hijacking situation, the head of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation may be called upon to assist the CMG. The state chief secretary or his representative may be invited to attend the center-level CMG if the crisis takes place in a particular state or involves residents of that state. In addition, depending upon the specific situation, a specific ministry or agency may set up its own CMG on an ad hoc basis under a senior official to help coordinate responses to a crisis at its own level. For example, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) does this quite often when evacuating its citizens from theatres in the Persian Gulf affected by violence.

In turn, the Cabinet secretary remains in close touch with the Prime Minister's Office, particularly the national security advisor (NSA) and the principal secretary to the prime minister. The Cabinet secretary will also directly brief the prime minster on the unfolding situation.

There is also a Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), which is headed by the prime minister but includes the external affairs minister, the defense minister, the home minister, and the finance minister as permanent members. Other ministers may be invited depending upon the nature of the crisis or emergency. The Cabinet secretary is the secretary of the CCS. The NSA also attends the CCS meetings. If necessary, the CCS may ask the heads of the intelligence agencies and the chiefs of the three armed forces to brief its members. The CCS meets to consider, at the apex political level, any serious threat to national security. The inputs from the CMG then feed into the deliberations of the CCS. CCS decisions are Cabinet decisions, and the Cabinet secretary will issue them as formal documents of the Cabinet.

It is important to note that the Cabinet secretary does not need any permission from any other authority to convene the CMG and may convene it whenever the situation demands it. However, he would apprise the prime minister and the NSA that he has done so and work in close consultation with them. The NSA may attend the CMG meetings as an invitee, but decisions taken at the CMG are with the authority of the Cabinet secretary. These decisions are executed promptly since all heads of key executing agencies are represented in the group. This also ensures the assignment of accountability in case of any lapse.

The Cabinet Secretariat headed by the Cabinet secretary maintains an up-to-date directory of all key functionaries of the government, including their telephone numbers, mobile numbers, and official and residential addresses. The same is repeated at the state level where the chief secretary's office will maintain similar directories. Therefore, it is easy to contact all members of the CMG and any special invitees whenever it must be convened.

The Cabinet Secretariat is a repository of the minutes of all its previous meetings and standard drills, which may have evolved to deal with particular categories of crises. For example, an anti-hijacking drill drawn up after very extensive and detailed deliberations provides considerable detail on how the state apparatus should respond in case of the hijacking of an Indian aircraft. The importance of having such drills — meant to be regularly updated to reflect recent events, developments in technology, and experiences in other countries — is that most operational issues do not require ad hoc decisions when an emergency arises. The NSA and the political leadership are then free to deal with larger issues that go beyond the handling of the crisis itself.

The management of media coverage of a rapidly evolving situation — accounting for the highly competitive and constant TV reporting in a country with a very assertive free press — is an essential part of crisis management. There are certain standard procedures that have already been implemented. For example, locations of terrorist attacks or any other calamity are required to be cordoned off by local police immediately, and the press is kept at the outer perimeter at all times. Press statements are made only by designated press spokesmen both at the central and state level and the CMG usually collectively decides the content of such statements. In cases with an external dimension, the MEA will normally take on the responsibility of conducting such briefings. In addition, there may be off-the-record briefings given to senior editors and journalists to confidentially provide them background on a particular situation.

India's crisis management system is a well-established institutional structure with carefully crafted protocols and procedures. It is designed to deal with emergent security threats and crises once they erupt. The operational drills permit immediate responses so that senior security and the political leadership can then deal with larger issues and focus on elements for which existing drills

may be inadequate. In theory, executing agencies know their respective responsibilities, reducing to a minimum turf battles and the scope for ad hoc and sometimes ill-considered actions. The detailed meeting records of the CMG and the CCS permit careful evaluation and learning for the future and become the basis for modifying and improving existing drills. However, these drills are not always followed and discretionary actions are more often the rule rather than the exception despite having these mechanisms in place.

Indian Crisis Management across Three Cases

Three cases — the 2004 Iraq hostage crisis, the 2008 Mumbai crisis, and the 2016 Pathankot attack — reveal how Indian policymakers have both opted and neglected to use established crisis management institutional architecture and the resulting consequences.

Case One: Iraq Hostage Crisis

On July 21, 2004, news emerged from the Indian Embassy in Kuwait that an Iraqi militant group calling itself the Holders of the Black Banners had taken hostage three Indian nationals employed by a Kuwaiti transport company, Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Co. (KGL). Along with the Indian drivers, the militants also held three Kenyans and one Egyptian. The group called upon the countries to which the drivers belonged to withdraw their nationals working for the "American occupation forces" in Iraq and to provide compensation to Iraqi families who had suffered loss of lives and property in U.S. operations in Fallujah.[1]

The crisis lasted 42 days. The drivers were finally released on Sept. 3 and were back to their homes on Sept. 5. The crisis was successfully handled with the safety of the three Indian citizens involved safeguarded. It could have ended otherwise. Around the same time, another Iraqi militant group brutally executed 12 Nepali drivers who were taken hostage.

How was this hostage crisis dealt with? As soon as the crisis erupted a CMG was set up in the MEA for day-to-day handling of the situation. It was led by the Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahmed, who possessed an extensive network of political, social, and business contacts in the Persian Gulf. From the outset, the minister worked the phones throughout the day, seeking information as well as assistance both from regional governments as well as business contacts. He was assisted by a team of senior officials. One team member was in constant touch with the families of the drivers in the state of Himachal Pradesh, keeping them apprised of efforts to obtain the release of their loved ones and reassuring them as much as possible. The official selected for this spoke Punjabi, the language of the families.

1. For reporting on the 2004 hostage crisis, see Raj Chengappa, "Blind Man's Bluff," *India Today,* August 23, 2004; "India Sets Up Crisis Management Group on Iraq," *The Times of India*, July 24, 2004; and V. Sudarshan, *Anatomy of an Abduction: How the Indian Hostages in Iraq Were Freed* (Gurgaon: Penguin Books India, 2008).

Another official kept in constant touch with Indian electronic and print media. In the initial stages, there was some disquiet over some TV channels interviewing the drivers' family members in the villages and asking leading questions like "[d]on't you think the government is doing nothing to get them released?" These TV broadcasts created an emotional and often ugly mood among the families and the wider community. Officials addressed this situation by adopting two measures.

First, the foreign secretary-designate convened a meeting of all senior TV producers and print media editors to impress upon them the need to undertake responsible reporting to avoid affecting the safety and survival of the hostages. It was also decided that the press spokesman of the ministry would always be available to answer any queries and the minister of state would make a statement on the hostage situation daily, providing regular updates once in the morning and once in the evening. In turn, the media would always check with MEA before breaking any story they may have come across from any other source. In the ensuing days, the Indian media generally cooperated except one instance when a premature announcement of the release of hostages was made erroneously by the Kenyan foreign minister and was immediately carried by all TV channels without cross-checking with the MEA. However, having the CMG in place helped handle this unfortunate incident expeditiously and contained any resulting damage to a minimum.

Second, the state and district authorities where the families of the hostages resided were advised to discourage TV crews from contacting the families to avoid communicating any untoward and negative signals to the hostage takers. They had already reacted angrily to being described in some reports as "terrorists." Managing the media was crucial to maintaining a relatively calm atmosphere within which authorities could deal with the crisis.

The senior official heading the division in the ministry handling the Persian Gulf countries assisted the minister of state by conveying regularly gathered information from Indian diplomatic missions in Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Qatar. In Baghdad, Indian diplomats were regularly in touch with tribal leaders, clergy, and other influential personages to establish contact with the kidnappers and to persuade them to release the hostages unharmed. In Kuwait, the Indian Embassy communicated with the top executives of the KGL company, urging them to own responsibility for securing the release of their employees. Specifically, the Indian government could not be involved in any ransom payment for the release of the drivers, unlike KGL. The MEA's CMG constantly collated and analyzed all these inputs to enable further measures as required.

The MEA-level CMG also shared its inputs with the national-level CMG headed by the Cabinet secretary, the senior most civil servant in the Indian government.

In this case, the national CMG also met at regular intervals and received updates on the latest developments from the foreign secretary.

In the Iraq hostage crisis, the intelligence agencies shared their inputs, which were organized together with information gathered by the MEA and its diplomatic missions in the Persian Gulf. The national CMG decided to dispatch a special team to Baghdad to establish direct contact with the kidnappers and/or intermediaries to seek the release of the drivers. A senior Arabic-speaking diplomat and another Arabic-speaking officer familiar with Iraq and the region in general led the team. The national-level CMG worked discreetly and drew upon the goodwill India generally enjoyed among the Iraqis. The kidnappers had assigned a tribal leader, Hisham Ad-Dulaimi, to negotiate the ransom terms with KGL representatives. The Indian Embassy in Kuwait and the special team in Baghdad worked behind the scenes to promote a deal.

There were setbacks, and at times the negotiations seemed to break down. However, despite the delay perseverance began to pay off. During this time, the families in India were encouraged to remain patient, the media was kept at bay, and great care was taken in statements made on behalf of government functionaries. It was agreed at the national CMG that it would be only the minister of state in the MEA and the official MEA Spokesman who would have the authority to make statements on behalf of the government. Maintaining this discipline was difficult, but discordant voices were largely avoided during the several weeks over which the crisis unfolded.

On Aug. 31, it seemed as if a deal had been struck between KGL and the tribal representative Dulaimi that represented the kidnappers. However, there was a last-minute hitch. The Indian special team then had to work urgently to get the negotiations back on track. It took another two days to secure the actual release.

Once the crisis was over, the MEA undertook a comprehensive and detailed study of how the crisis unfolded over the 42 days and the manner in which it was handled. The lessons drawn from this experience have become a template for future crises. The detailed meeting records of the national CMG are an especially valuable tool that the government can use to develop institutional memory to prevent mistakes and ensure key lessons are incorporated into drills and other management mechanisms for future crises.

Case Two: The 2008 Mumbai Crisis

The terrorist attack against Mumbai on Nov. 26, 2008, resulted in the deaths of at least 172 people, including several foreigners. The terror attacks unfolded over 60 hours at multiple locations in India's commercial capital. The 10 well-trained terrorists, split into four groups, were affiliated with the Pakistan based group Lashkar-e-Taiba, whose senior functionaries were in touch with the attackers throughout the attack — boosting their morale, giving directions, and urging them to kill as many

targets as possible. Since the details are well-known, they are not covered in detail in this case study.[2] The purpose here is to focus on institutional shortcomings and gaps which led to a fragmented and often incoherent response.[3]

Case Three: Terrorist Attack against the Indian Air Force Base at Pathankot

The latest terrorist attack on the Pathankot Air Force Station on Jan. 2, 2016, confirmed fears that authorities failed to learn lessons from the Mumbai attack. This was visible both in the failure to harden the security perimeter around the base and in the ad hoc and uncoordinated response to the attack. Despite its proximity to the Line of Control, this key Air Force base obviously had gaps in its security perimeter that allowed the armed terrorists, probably six in number, to enter the base undetected and hide for several hours before launching their murderous attack. The attackers kept Indian security forces tied down for almost three days.[4]

Crisis Management Lessons and Shortcoming Reforms

Key Takeaways from the Cases Reviewed

From the postmortem analyses carried out with respect to the Mumbai and Pathankot attacks, several shortcomings are apparent in the state's response to the terrorist attacks at both the central and state levels. These inadequacies include a preference for ad hoc responses, poor media management, and limited coordination and communication among actors both within and outside of the central government.

In both Mumbai and Pathankot, the Indian government favored ad hoc procedures over the established crisis management mechanisms, which were either not mobilized when most needed or failed to deliver on their mandate when deployed. In the Mumbai case, this may have been because the national security advisor took on the crisis management role but without recourse to the institutional resources available to the state or because the CMG, when it met apparently a day later, preferred a devolution of responsibility for managing the crisis elsewhere. There also does not appear to have been any meaningful coordination between the central government and the Maharashtra state government.

One particular instance underscores the perils of ad hoc-ism. It was reported that the National Security Guard (NSG) contingent — specifically trained to

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2. For examples, see Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Seth G. Jones et al., *The Lessons of Mumbai* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009); Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis: US Crisis Management after the 2008 Mumbai Attacks* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012); and B. Raman, *Mumbai 26/11: A Day of Infamy* (New Delhi: Lancer, 2012).

3. Shyam Saran, "Lessons of 26/11 Must Not Go Unaddressed," *Hindustan Times*, November 26, 2013.

4. "Punjab's Pathankot Air Base Attacked: How it Happened," *Hindustan Times*, January 2, 2016; "Details of Chargesheet Filed by The NIA in Pathankot Terror Attack," *Times Now News*, December 19, 2016; and Shyam Saran, "Pathankot-like Security Challenges," *Hindustan Times*, January 6, 2016.

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deal with hostage situations — could not be moved from their base in Delhi to Mumbai until a day later because no air transport was available. Worse, on arrival at the Mumbai airport, no ground transport was immediately available either. Had the CMG met more urgently and functioned properly, it would have asked the Directorate General of Civil Aviation to immediately commandeer any available civil aircraft for the NSG's needs. The Maharashtra state government would have been ordered to provide transportation to the NSG commandos on their arrival in Mumbai.

Poor media management posed another shortcoming of the ad hoc approach, as no institution took responsibility for this task. The free-wheeling TV coverage from very close to the scenes of action became a valuable guide to the terrorists and their handlers to adapt their actions in response. It also gifted to the terrorist group and its sponsors within Pakistan wide international exposure and broadcasted the vulnerability and incompetence of New Delhi in handling terrorist attacks. Some agencies involved in the rescue operations appeared more interested in getting their five minutes of fame on television than in carrying out their duties professionally.[5] It has been alleged that some agencies were guilty of leaking sensitive operational information to the media, which was then relayed to the attackers through their handlers. Fortunately, in the Pathankot case there was better media management, but here too a carefully formulated communication strategy was absent, which led to a premature announcement that the combing operations at the base had been concluded.

Limited coordination and communication posed additional challenges. When the Mumbai terrorist attack began, there was also considerable confusion at the state level in Maharashtra. No state-level CMG met when the crisis broke. There was no single operational headquarters set up to coordinate the response to the attacks and to function as the single interface with the central government, and

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5. Government of India, *Kargil Review Committee Report*, February 23, 2000, available at the Nuclear Weapon Archive, http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/India/KargilRCB.html.

contradictory instructions passed back and forth between multiple central and state agencies without a nexus of coordination.

In the case of Pathankot, limited coordination and poor flow of information similarly hurt the effectiveness of crisis management. There was initial confusion over what had happened. Authorities neither knew how many terrorists had managed to infiltrate nor the point (or points) of ingress. There was failure, initially, to link the crisis with and earlier incident involving a senior Punjab state police officer, which may have been linked to a cross-border smuggling racket. It appears that the terrorists crossed the heavily fortified border by taking advantage of routes used for drug smuggling, sometimes with the complicity of border guarding personnel and the state law and order machinery. The initial antiterrorist operations were carried out by the air force itself, but then the National Intelligence Agency was brought in. There was confusion as to which agency should lead the antiterrorist operations, and media reports suggested behind-the-scenes turf battles. Active operations inside the base stretched over three days and combing operations across the sprawling base took even longer.

Upon closer evaluation, the Indian government's responses to the Mumbai and Pathankot attacks were incoherent, uncoordinated, and ineffective mainly because it decided to bypass its own well-established institutional setup and failed to follow established drills. There was a wholesale devotion to ad hoc responses that could not keep up with very rapidly changing situations. There continues to be a penchant for ad hoc responses, rather than building upon well-established institutional mechanisms and fully tested drills. Well-established crisis response drills, drawn up after detailed deliberations and constantly reviewed and updated, often remain solely on paper. Such detailed drills and standard procedures, involving multiple agencies, were drafted for the CMG after the 1999 Kandahar hostage crisis, which was spurred by an aircraft hijacking incident. However, one wonders whether officials will adhere to the drill during an actual future hijacking incident.

The value of relying upon a well-established institutional structure — with unambiguous lines of authority where each arm of the state understands its role — cannot be overstated. No individual functionary or multiplicity of functionaries acting in an ad hoc and uncoordinated fashion can deal effectively with a crisis. Neither in the case of Mumbai nor Pathankot was there any mention of the CMG. The Cabinet secretary appears to have been a bystander. If the CMG has been set aside, has a more efficient institutional structure been put in its place? Are there explicit drills for well-trained personnel at clearly designated agencies to respond to specific crises? Were these in action at Pathankot? Available evidence shows that the answer is negative. The deployment of security personnel such as the NSG or the army appears to have been ad hoc, reactive, and mostly uncoordinated.

Necessary Reforms: Personnel, Priorities, and Governance

There are other significant deficiencies for which Indian authorities ought to pursue urgent reforms, especially involving personnel, priorities, and governance.

Personnel. There is a failure to appreciate that any security system is ultimately only as effective as its junior-most foot soldier. The best superstructure remains a house built on sand unless it is supported by highly trained and highly motivated personnel at the lower rungs of the hierarchy. Law and order is a state subject, as opposed to a national subject. Most of the recruitment of police personnel at these levels is subject to political patronage and corruption. Once recruited, these personnel are rarely provided even basic training. Some recruits, being virtually illiterate, are not even trainable in any sense. Their working and living conditions are often pathetic, and unsurprisingly, they are highly susceptible to corruption. Moreover, most state governments are guilty of allowing large vacancies in their police forces. India has one of the lowest police-to-population ratios at 125 officers per 100,000 people. Therefore, at the ground level there is virtually no policing of the kind that might have apprehended the Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists as they landed on the beach outside Mumbai. That there is regular smuggling from across the sea is an open secret. The Mumbai terrorists likely slipped into India using these smuggling routes and relied upon local smuggling networks that may have paid off the local police. Additional bureaucratic layers added to an already top-heavy system will not likely make any difference unless the reality at the local level is addressed.

Priorities. There is inordinate emphasis on the personal security of political personages and senior officials at the expense of public security, and this focus is continuing to rise at a staggering rate. Against the previously mentioned miserable numbers of police personnel per the overall population, there are three security personnel, on an average, for every "very important person" (VIP). The highest 120 VIPs command details of 30-40 NSG each.[6] Some political leaders are protected by as many as 100 or more security guards at the Indian state's expense. This is anachronistic in a democratic society, but it also adversely impacts the state's ability to ensure public security and law and order, without which authorities cannot address terrorist threats.

Governance. Finally, there is an overarching challenge of governance itself. Over the years, an extensive "arbitrage economy" has risen in India thanks to administrative and differential pricing of key resources, commodities, and services. For example, kerosene is subsidized because it is ostensibly used by the poorest sections in the country, but more than 40 percent of all subsidized kerosene sold is diverted to the black market where it is resold for adulterating other more expensive fuels. This has criminalized large sectors of the economy controlled by powerful mafias with links to politicians. These market distortions create

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6. Rajesh Ahuja, "Staggering Rise in Number of People Receiving VIP Protection; Goes Up to 454," *Hindustan Times*, May 30, 2016.

opportunities for exploitation by terrorists and criminals. The Modi government is partially addressing this problem through a gradual replacement of subsidies with direct transfer of welfare benefits using the biometric-based unique identity system known locally as *Aadhar*. This initiative will shrink the scope for arbitrage as will the gradual spread of digital transactions. However, some weaknesses remain unaddressed.

In addition, the January 2016 terrorist attack in Pathankot saw terrorists likely entering into Indian territory by taking advantage of the several smuggling routes, in particular those used for drug trafficking. The connivance of elements in our border security forces that have been compromised because of large payoffs is widely known. There is a similar situation along the India-Myanmar border. Large shipments of contraband goods, including drugs, make their way into Manipur across the border, which is controlled by a powerful trade mafia. Elements in the local administration, border guarding forces, and border revenue are often compromised. Should it be surprising that terrorist elements are also able to enter without hindrance like contraband smugglers to then attack targets in the country? Even if authorities were to harden the India-Pakistan border, would the terrorists not move their operations to another stretch of India's porous borders? The legalization and regulation of cross-border trade would provide one important means of reducing this threat.

A strong agency at the national level and the best gadgetry in the world will not meet the challenge of cross-border terrorism if these long-standing governance infirmities remain unaddressed. Unless there is political will to undertake urgent structural reforms, India will continue to be vulnerable to such security challenges.

Evaluation, Transparency, and Implementing Reform

To learn lessons from policy failure, states must conduct internal autopsies and audits of procedures to determine what went wrong. In the aftermath of the crisis management failures in Mumbai and in Pathankot, the government avoided objective and public evaluation into reasons for its mismanagement. This contrasts the open and transparent investigation and evaluation carried out by an independent body of highly respected experts after the 1999 Kargil War, chaired by K. Subrahmanyam, a well-known security analyst and former senior official in the Ministry of Defence. Since two of the cases relate to cross-border terrorism involving Pakistan, it would be worthwhile to recall the assessment made by the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) on the security gaps that allowed the Pakistani intrusion and its key recommendations for strengthening the country's security. Furthermore, the report was released as a public document that

could be debated openly.[7] This ensured a degree of public accountability, which is very important in a democracy.

The Kargil Review Committee Report

The Kargil War unfolded over May-July 1999 along a 200-kilometer trans-Himalayan front when Pakistani troops occupied the heights across the Line of Control — undetected by Indian security forces — and threatened the key highway linking the Kashmir Valley with Ladakh. When the war ended with the ousting of the Pakistani troops from most of the heights they had occupied and the withdrawal of the rest under U.S. pressure, attention in India shifted to assessing what allowed the intrusion to go undetected and lessons to draw from the experience. It was on July 24, 1999, that the Cabinet decided to constitute a committee of independent experts with a mandate "to analyze whether the kind of Pakistani aggression that took place could have been assessed from the available intelligence inputs and if so, what were the shortcomings and failures which led to the nation being caught by surprise."[8] Since the Mumbai and Pathankot cases considered in this essay are Pakistan-related, it may be worth recalling the KRC report's identification of the Indian side shortcomings and recommendations on how to avoid a future Kargil-type situation.

A Group of Ministers (GOM) was set up in April 2000 to consider the recommendations and ensure their implementation. It included the central ministers of home, defense, external affairs, and finance, with the national security advisor included as a special invitee. The GOM in turn set up four task forces to deal with specific subjects: intelligence apparatus, internal security, border management, and defense management. The reports of the task force were submitted to the GOM on Sept. 30, 2000, and the GOM itself submitted its recommendations to the Cabinet in February 2001. The CCS considered these recommendations and approved all for implementation in a decision adopted on May 11, 2001.

A number of the KRC recommendations are worth revisiting because they were not fully implemented in deed or spirit and continue to shape crisis management failures in India. The KRC recommended the following points.

Full-time National Security Advisor. The NSA should be a full-time position and not a part-time responsibility with some other senior governmental position. The position became full-time only when there was a change of government in 2004. Initially the responsibilities of the principal secretary to the prime minister and NSA were vested in the same person.

Revived Defence Intelligence Agency. There should be an efficiently functioning Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) comprised of the army, navy, and air force

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

8. Ibid.

that undertakes defense-related intelligence gathering and assessment as a parallel intelligence track to the Research and Analysis Wing (in charge of external intelligence) and the Intelligence Bureau (in charge of internal security and counterintelligence). Although the DIA was set up in 2002, its current capabilities and functionality are neither publicly known nor well understood.

Defined Roles for Army, Paramilitaries, and Police. The army should not take on internal or counterinsurgency duties, as this detracts from its normal role of defending the country's borders. Police forces must address internal security duties, and properly trained and equipped paramilitary forces should address counterinsurgency. There has been partial implementation of this recommendation. While the Central Reserve Police Force has been assigned this role, its training and equipment leaves much to be desired, and police forces, which are under state jurisdiction, are not adequate. Their working conditions are poor, recruitment is influenced by political patronage, and their equipment is outdated. To date, the army has continued to engage in counterinsurgency duties, particularly when there are major incidents.

Border Management Overhaul. A major recommendation was for a complete renovation of India's border management. The committee found that India's long land borders remained porous, allowing the relatively free flow of narcotics, illegal immigrants, terrorists, and weapons. It recommended that each border be assigned to one paramilitary force so that over time each can become familiar with the terrain, its particular challenges, and threats. These forces would also develop improved infrastructure, surveillance and interdiction capabilities, and local intelligence. This recommendation has been implemented with the Border Security Force assigned to the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police assigned to the Chinese border, the Seema Suraksha Bal (a newly created paramilitary force) assigned to the Nepal and Bhutan borders, and the Assam Rifles assigned to the Myanmar border. These forces are all under the administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs, which has a Department of Border Management to administer them. However, experience over the past few years has revealed that important weaknesses remain, including the lack of manpower, inadequacy of training and equipment, and poor intelligence gathering capabilities.

Promoting Important Areas of Study. The Kargil Committee made some overall observations and recommendations that are relevant not only for the specific challenge posed by a hostile Pakistan but also for the overall management of national security. For example, concerning intelligence, the committee said "[a] generalist administration culture would appear to permeate the intelligence field."[9] It called for the promotion of specialized studies, tasking think tanks and universities to undertake specific studies and encouraged area specialization.

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9. Ibid.

It also emphasized the need for language studies on a much wider scale than currently available. In recent years, there has been a mushrooming of foreign policy and security-related think tanks in India, and some universities have expanded their area studies programs. However, the quality of their output is patchy and still lacks regular and institutionalized engagement between governmental decision-making personnel and academic institutions. Such engagement as exists is only episodic.

Improved Information and Media Management. The KRC drew specific attention to the importance of strategic communications and media management in crisis situations. It was imperative that the state provides citizens with authentic up-to-date information in such situations, as rumors and speculations complicate crisis management. This has become even more important in the emerging world of Facebook and Twitter. To create an informed public opinion on key issues of national security, the KRC recommended a white paper on India's nuclear weapons program. It further highlighted the lack of official public policy documentation on the Kashmir dispute and authoritative official histories of the armed conflicts that had threatened India's security such as the 1948-49 India-Pakistan War over Kashmir, the 1965 Rann of Kutch War, the 1971 India-Pakistan War, and the latest conflict over Kargil. This documentation, it said, should be authentic and include comprehensive politico-military references to which public opinion could refer. These recommendations remain unimplemented.

Formulating a Comprehensive Strategy. While the committee pointed to specific security gaps and recommended corrective measures, it recognized that these had to be located in a comprehensive security policy that reflected the changing threat scenario:

> An effective and appropriate national security planning and decision-making structure for India in the nuclear age is overdue, taking account of the revolution in military affairs and threats of proxy war and terrorism and the imperative of modernising the Armed Forces. An objective assessment of the last 52 years will show that the country is lucky to have scraped through various national security threats without too much damage, except in 1962. The country can no longer afford such ad hoc functioning.[10]

No follow-up steps were taken on this critical recommendation, and ad hocism has continued to characterize the state's response to crises, even with the creation of standard drills for a more informed response.

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10. Ibid.

> The Indian government does not lack proper diagnostics or awareness of the means to remedy gaps in security, but these efforts are inhibited by perverse political incentives and the absence of an overarching, clarifying, and organizing statement of national security strategy.

Task Force on National Security

A follow-up effort to the KRC revealed the limits of such evaluative bodies if recommendations remain non-transparent and reforms are not implemented. On June 21, 2011, the Task Force on National Security was established under the chairmanship of former Cabinet Secretary Naresh Chandra to examine India's security challenges in some detail, especially regarding how much follow-up had taken place on the earlier KRC recommendations.[11] It presented its report in May 2012. However, unlike the Kargil Committee Report, whose contents were made public, only some sparse details of the National Task Force's report are available publicly.

The task force reiterated several of the observations of the decade-earlier KRC. Despite the KRC emphasis on coordination among intelligence agencies, the Mumbai terrorist attack had starkly exposed the lack of intelligence sharing, expert analysis, and regular intelligence briefing of decision-making levels in government. The task force endorsed remedial steps, such as the setting up of the National Intelligence Agency and the proposal to set up a counterterrorism unit with branches in states (this is as yet unimplemented).

The task force made several other recommendations related to different dimensions of national security. These included the creation of a special operations command within the armed forces to tackle new asymmetric threats, an aerospace command to integrate India's considerable space capabilities into its national security system, a cyber command for an integrated management of cybersecurity, an advanced projects agency for promoting defense technology and innovation, and a national defense university.

But the most important recommendation made by the task force stressed the necessity for India to formulate and publicly articulate a national security doctrine and a national security strategy, which could enable comprehensive, coherent,

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11. Nitin Gokhale, "Naresh Chandra Task Force on National Security: An Appraisal," Vivekanada International Foundation, July 16, 2012, http://www.vifindia.org/article/2012/july/16/naresh-chandra-task-force-s-report-on-national-security-an-appraisal.

and coordinated policymaking. This strongly reiterates the point made by the KRC that there needs to be an approved template that guides different government agencies to respond to different crises on the basis of a shared national security doctrine and a strategy.

Conclusion

Deliberate political choices, not ignorance, have weakened the effectiveness of crisis management in India. The Indian government does not lack proper diagnostics or awareness of the means to remedy gaps in security, but these efforts are inhibited by perverse political incentives and the absence of an overarching, clarifying, and organizing statement of national security strategy. As we have seen, there are effective drills in place to meet different types of crisis situations. Some have even been rehearsed through simulated exercises. However, when a crisis erupts, these drills are mostly set aside in favor of ad hoc responses that then invariably lead to suboptimal results. The question is why, despite repeated reviews and recommendations by experienced experts, do we not see much change in this regard? How is it that in the Iraq hostage crisis, the established drill was allowed to work without interference but in the case of Mumbai and Pathankot it was not?

In my view, the Iraq hostage crisis was politically less serious than the Mumbai terrorist attack and the Pathankot attack. In the latter cases, the level of political sensitivity was much higher and, therefore, there was an attempt to control the political narrative, which eventually proved futile and even counterproductive. The desire to remain in charge almost invariably ended in having no control whatsoever over fast-moving events that encompass all crises. There is a failure to recognize that by precisely following carefully crafted security drills it might be possible to remain in relative control of the narrative.

Furthermore, political sensitivity and the desire not to be held responsible for failure also limit transparency. Crisis management can only improve through constant lesson learning from past experiences. In the case of Kargil, we have an example of a government opening itself to scrutiny and investigation by experts outside of the governmental system. In the other two cases, we see an attempt to avoid transparent accounting, which reduces the likelihood of learning important lessons from how authorities handled these crises. Those guilty of mismanagement are unlikely to make an honest assessment of their own failings or suggest changes, which may come at the cost of their personal or organizational vested interests. Thus, such investigation and accounting must be institutionalized, as opposed to being left to the discretion of the political leadership.

Another reason for ad hoc-ism is India's lack of a national security doctrine or even a more limited national security strategy. Without such a doctrine/strategy, it is difficult to have a whole-of-government response to any crisis. Most

crises require a coordinated response from several agencies of the state and may even involve nonstate entities like the media. Both the Kargil Committee and the later Task Force on National Security underlined the urgent necessity for a national security doctrine and strategy, but successive governments have not adopted one even though there have been efforts to undertake this exercise, including in the National Security Advisory Board under the National Security Council. Therefore, while the specific recommendations of these two very important expert bodies are extremely valuable, they need to be pursued as part and parcel of a larger national security strategy that in turn must be rooted in a national security doctrine. Such a doctrine must have a clear vision for India's future, the kind of a country and society the country wishes to become over the medium and long term, alternative trajectories that are available to achieve national objectives, and likely challenges and threats. This cannot be a one-time exercise but instead requires constant review as circumstances change. It needs to be based on a broad political consensus, particularly in a democracy like India, and become a guide for policymaking not only across all levels of government but also broader society. Without these steps, ad hoc-ism invariably becomes the default response to crises to India's detriment.