

Net Security Provider: India's Out-of-Area Contingency Operations IDSA

REVIEW BY DOMINIC KARUNESUDAS

The Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) published recently a well-researched and documented report on *Net Security Provider: India's Out-of-Area Contingency Operations*. The book focuses on examining the Indian military's Out-of-Area Contingency (OOAC) operations. It helps the readers to analyse previous deployments of the Indian military outside its borders, including UN Peacekeeping Operations, evacuation of Indian citizens from conflict zones and in active operations such as Sri Lanka from 1987-90 and the Maldives in 1988. The book also examines the current capacity and trends for executing such operations efficiently. In light of its capabilities and possible overseas role, the Indian military has been called a 'net security provider' in the region. It also offers recommendations to the Armed Forces and to other relevant agencies such as the Ministries of Defence and External Affairs, the National Security Council and the Cabinet Secretariat.

The report argues that despite claims about the capabilities to conduct OOAC operations, the Armed Forces and other government agencies still need to devote significant amount of resources and attention to this issue.

Like in other countries, the Indian diplomatic community will have to create additional capacities to handle emerging challenges and complexities. For instance, in the United States, the State Department has a separate office headed by a Deputy Assistant Secretary and staffed by a healthy mix of civilian and military personnel responsible for planning, policy and analysis of international security operations under the Bureau of Political Military Affairs.

One of the main recommendations made consistently throughout this report is the necessity of creating an Emergency Division (ED) within the MEA. Such a division would be responsible for all contingencies,

including NEOs, humanitarian and disaster relief operations and all forms of OOAC operations. Such a division, moreover, could assist regional JSs in other unforeseen situations—like providing support to the Indian diaspora and other such contingencies. This division can preserve the database of all previous operations, list the lessons learnt for future use and prepare SOPs for envisaged contingencies.

These SOPs should be periodically reviewed as and when there is any change in the capability of any agency or establishment. The SOPs should clearly lay down various time lines, which shall ensure better coordination. Should a contingency arise in a particular area, the role of the Division under whose jurisdiction that area falls should be advisory in nature while that of the ED should be that of the executive.

Finally the report concludes with key policy recommendations. The first major recommendation is the creation of an Out-of-Area Contingency (OOAC) Directorate in HQ IDS with dedicated staff and assets. Creating and attaching importance to this office will focus more attention on planning, training, equipping and preparations for OOACs. As a result, currently neglected but critically important issues like language studies, development of area specialists, plans for strategic communications, logistics, and so on would, in all likelihood, get the attention they need. Such an office could also undertake scenario planning, war-gaming and run training exercises for both civilian and military agencies expected to take part in an OOAC operation.

The second major recommendation is to create an ED in the MEA that would be primarily tasked for handling crises and also for OOAC operations. Currently, the existing workload within the MEA, with respective desks and the Coordination Division, is not suitable for handling crisis situations. A need

is, therefore, felt for an ED with officials from complementary services. Such an office will also help in NEO operations by, among other measures, examining previous missions, initiating Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and conducting training and scenario exercises. By the nature of its duties, the office will have to work closely with the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Service Headquarters and the proposed OOAC Command or joint directorate.

In addition, this office could collect data pertaining to the Indian diaspora specifically for evacuation purposes. Previous evacuation operations were hindered by the absence of this type of data and a means of communicating with the diaspora. It is recommended therefore that details and location of Indian nationals be maintained in missions, under overall directions of ED, to facilitate their location and evacuation in case of an emergency. The use of modern media and social networking tools like Facebook, Twitter and micro-blogging sites can further assist in mobilising people. Finally, there is a need to create an organisation for inter-agency coordination when OOAC operations involve more than the Ministries of Defence and External Affairs.

Among the major findings of the study was the inadequacy of a suitable organisational structure for OOAC when it is being conducted. At the apex level, the study suggests a high-level committee to oversee planning and execution. Given past experience, it should include key functionaries led by the Prime Minister with the option of delegation, depending upon the nature of task. The coordinating agency should either be the Cabinet Secretary's office or the National Security Council Secretariat. This issue will require some deliberation to see which office would have the best capacity and clout to manage inter-agency coordination. Ideally this office should start functioning, with skeletal staff, in peacetime so that it can conduct planning and training exercises.