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Why Intelligence Fails

Janani Krishnaswamy

Public Policy Scholar



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Abstract

In this policy report, Ms. Janani Krishnaswamy examines the repeated failures of India's secret intelligence agencies through the lens of a broad 'reform failure'. She asserts that intelligence failures predominantly arise from reform makers' inability to make sensible reforms, than an analyst's failure to make imaginative analysis. After interacting with numerous former intelligence personnel and analysing two major intelligence review committee reports published in the aftermath of Kargil 1999 and Mumbai 26/11, she argues that insufficient theorisation in the field of intelligence studies and a few mistaken perceptions about intelligence failure among intelligence consumers have led to weak intelligence reforms.

At the heart of the policy report is a theoretical framework for cataloguing failures. She has created four categories of failure such as 'intelligence failure' or failure to produce accurate intelligence, 'policy failure' or failure to act on intelligence, 'adaptation failure' or failure to implement reforms, and 'reform failure' or failure to implement sensible reforms.

As policy decisions are often guided by political perceptions about policy issues, she identifies that the apparent indifference towards and lack of knowledge of intelligence and security matters among political leaders is the reason behind the lack of a cohesive and coherent counter-terrorism and intelligence policy. Asserting the importance of establishing definitional clarity in intelligence studies, Ms. Krishnaswamy aims at improving the quality of intelligence review committees in the country and enabling a better system of checks and balances to appraise the failures of the intelligence community through the theoretical framework developed in this paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Statement of Problem.....	1
CHAPTER 2: A Rationale for Theorising.....	5
CHAPTER 3: Challenges Facing Intelligence Studies in India.....	12
CHAPTER 4: What Do We Know About Intelligence Failures?	14
CHAPTER 5: Critical Analysis of Intelligence Review Committees.....	26
CHAPTER 6: Framework for a Theory Explaining Intelligence Failures.....	33
CHAPTER 7: Re-interpreting 26/11.....	39
CHAPTER 8: The Golden Mean: Striking a Balance between Secrecy and Sharing.....	42
CHAPTER 9: Direction for Future Intelligence Reforms.....	45

Chapter 1

Introduction and Statement of Problem

“An intelligence failure or an inability to pre-empt an attack will easily get publicised because of the proportion of damage caused by the terrorist attack. On the other hand, the number of times bombs you (an intelligence agency) might have diffused never gets publicised.”

- Information & Broadcasting Minister, Manish Tewari¹

The Indian government has been spending a substantial amount of money for strengthening its intelligence apparatus.² Yet, the country has been witnessing numerous instances of terrorist attacks. India has now become prone to more terrorist attacks since 26/11 than the United States has since 9/11. While the recent Boston bombing was a major case of publicised intelligence failure in the US after 9/11, several Indian states have been constant prey to terrorist groups in the aftermath of 26/11. The intelligence agencies in several Indian states have been frequently coming under the scanner for perceived ignorance and incompetence in countering terrorism. The central intelligence agencies have earned the wrath of the government for failing to sufficiently warn local agencies.

Why do our secret intelligence agencies fail repeatedly? Is it because of (a) lack of adequate intelligence, (b) dearth of trained manpower in the intelligence sector, (c) failure to apply latest sophisticated technology in surveillance, (d) lack of proper intelligence sharing between the Centre and the states, (e) lack of action on available intelligence, (f) the current state of political instability or (g) the lack of sensible intelligence reforms? In the aftermath of the terrorist attack at Dilsukhnagar in Hyderabad, India's secret intelligence agencies were subject to an intense inspection. Heated political debates over the construction of the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), a controversial anti-terror hub that was proposed in the aftermath of 26/11 attacks, was stirred up after five years.

Are such organisational reforms sufficient to fix the problems of the intelligence community? Intelligence review committees and politicians constantly assess the performance of intelligence agencies and underline numerous failures within the intelligence system. As a result, they have reinforced the need for several reforms. Indian intelligence scholars, for the most part, are interested in subjects such as the legal framework for intelligence agencies and mechanisms for oversight. However, no one has questioned the state of intelligence theorisation in the country or the level of knowledge of politicians and reform makers — about intelligence and intelligence failures. The main research question addressed in this paper is what do we (producers and consumers of intelligence) know about intelligence failures and what do we do about them?

Taking the cases of failure to prevent 26/11 and the Kargil conflict of 1999, this paper analyses the current state of intelligence reform making and addresses some of the most pressing issues relating to the Indian intelligence scene. The paper questions whether (a) the lack of sufficient understanding — of national security and intelligence issues — of a few politicians, (b) the current state of intelligence reform making or (c) gaps in intelligence sharing have led to the increasing number of terrorist attacks in the country. The policy paper calls for a theory to explain intelligence failures and advances two strong arguments relating to theory building. First, it argues that there is a lacuna in theory-driven academic treatises in intelligence studies in India. Second, it makes the case that a theory developed with a better understanding of the culture and

¹Interview with the Minister, New Delhi, August 6, 2013.

²Sources privy to such kind of information say the Indian government will spend approximately Rs.6000 crores on intelligence reforms over a five-year-period between 2010 and 2015.

bureaucratic functioning of the intelligence agencies in India can be helpful in understanding why secret intelligence fails.

Aims and Objectives

The policy paper aims at analysing why India's secret intelligence agencies fail repeatedly and find out what we do about them. Its objectives are:

1. To study the state of affairs of intelligence studies in India;
2. To examine what we know and what we do about intelligence failures;
3. To analyse the state of intelligence reform making in the country;
4. To identify the need for theorisation on the subject;
5. To bring more definitional clarity to intelligence studies; and
6. To develop a theoretical framework towards a theory explaining intelligence failures.

Research Design

A mix of qualitative analysis and in-depth interviewing has been used to gain scholarly awareness of all the activities of the intelligence community at large, i.e. better knowledge about and less misunderstanding of the nature of the intelligence business in the country.

Qualitative Analysis

First, the paper will analyse the failure to prevent 26/11 by taking an in-depth look at the report of the Ram Pradhan Committee — the High-Level Enquiry Committee (HLEC) on 26/11 — appointed by the Maharashtra Government on December 30, 2008, to probe the intelligence and law enforcement response to the 2008 Mumbai attacks. After this, the consequent reforms and the influence of American intelligence reforms in fixing the problems of the Indian intelligence community will be studied. Next, the report of the Kargil Review Committee, which was set up after the Kargil intrusions in 1999, will be analysed. Later, the two aforementioned reports will be compared to determine the nature of intelligence reviewing and reform building in the country. The analysis of the Kargil Review Committee report will be restricted to the intelligence-related problems identified by the Committee and the recommendations published in the Group of Ministers (GoM) report. Later, the paper will study what recommendations have been made in the post 26/11 era and identify how many of them have been implemented.

Second, it will review a few popular political perceptions about intelligence failure. After this, the paper will analyse the state of intelligence studies in India and later, look to several intelligence scholars in the international community to find some theoretical direction.

I have had the desire to study the most significant and most recent material in the field as I hope such a literary review will illustrate the different theoretical standpoints. I have managed to get some insight into the extent of theorising in the West. As a starting point, I utilised *Intelligence theory: Key questions and debates*. This collection of essays has offered an excellent idea about the principal debates in the field. A survey report on the state of intelligence studies by Loch K. Johnson and Allison M. Shelton has also presented greater insight. However, I referred to several other works assessing several instances of intelligence failures spread across the history of the West. Such an inquiry into intelligence debates in the West is very useful because the Indian intelligence set-up is 'heavily modelled on its British and American counterparts'.³

In-depth Interviews

³ Prem Mahadevan, 'Politics of Counterterrorism in India: Strategic intelligence and national security in South Asia. (I.B.Tauris: London), p22

The paper gains awareness into the hidden problems of the intelligence community through in-depth interactions with several former intelligence personnel, government officials, terrorism experts, erudite scholars and journalists. Interviews were conducted over seven days in New Delhi and Mumbai.

To understand the intelligence producer's perspective on intelligence failures, I had some in-depth interactions with a handful of former members of the intelligence community, including a recently retired director of the Intelligence Bureau⁴, former R&AW director Vikram Sood, former additional secretary, Cabinet Secretariat and R&AW, Jayadeva Ranade, former IB deputy director and director, Central Bureau of Investigation, R.K. Raghavan, former special director, Central Bureau of Investigation, D.R. Karthikeyan, and former additional director, K.V. Thomas.

Former home secretary, Gopal Krishna Pillai, and present Information & Broadcasting minister & Congress MP, Manish Tewari, offered interesting insights into the intelligence consumer's perspectives.

As the paper looks into 26/11 in an in-depth manner, I interviewed the co-author of the Ram Pradhan Committee report, V. Balachandran, who pinned down the main problem of the intelligence community, and former Mumbai police commissioner and commissioner of intelligence, D. Sivanandan.

Several others who offered great insight into the functioning of intelligence agencies included defence analyst Manoj Joshi, terrorism studies experts Ajai Sahni and Srinath Raghavan, and journalists from The Hindu Vinay Kumar and Sandeep Joshi.

The interviewees were selected based on snowball sampling.

Justification for Selection of Case Studies

The reason behind selecting the case studies of Kargil 1999 and 26/11 is that the country's two major intelligence review committees have been set up in the aftermath of these attacks. The first major effort for internal security reform in the country was the setting up of a Review Committee on July 29, 1999 in the aftermath of the Pakistan intrusion in Kargil. The Kargil Committee submitted report on Dec 15, 1999.

A Group of Ministers (GoM) was formed on April 17, 2000 to re-examine the problems — of security and intelligence — raised in the report, and consequently set up Task Forces for (1) Intelligence (2) Internal Security (3) Border Management and (4) Defence. The GoM forwarded their recommendations to the Prime Minister on Feb 19, 2001.

However, nothing much was done either by the NDA or by the UPA government till the 26/11 attacks. This was when former home minister P. Chidambaram codified the National Investigation Agency Bill (2008) within 19 days. Immediately after the attacks, he set up the Ram Pradhan Committee to review the intelligence and security lapses that caused the attack. Moreover, the 26/11 terrorist attacks provide a good case for greater understanding of (a) the influence of, or lack of influence of intelligence analysis on policy makers, (b) the influence of intelligence reforms in preventing future terrorist attacks, and (c) the influence of US intelligence reform making to tackle India's intelligence problems.

Organisation of Chapters

In the chapters that follow, I will highlight the need for theorisation in the field of intelligence studies in India. The introductory chapter will clearly state the research problem and explain how the paper will deal with the subject of intelligence failure.

In the second chapter, I will clearly describe the problem in the different approaches of evaluating intelligence failures, analyse the shortcomings of the past research agenda and explain why there needs to be a theory to explain the repeated failures of the intelligence community. It

⁴ Name withheld for protecting identity

will include a short review of past studies on intelligence failures and intelligence reforms and also set the mood for an elaborate investigation into why secret intelligence fails.

In the third chapter, I will discuss some of the important challenges faced by intelligence studies in the country. Here, I will make an inquiry into the nature of national security information that is available for intelligence scholars. This kind of inquiry is essential because the understanding of the nature and working of intelligence agencies and the repeated failures of the community is limited due to the unavailability of certain types of information. I introduce this section as I believe we should know far more about the activities and processes within intelligence agencies to be able to offer valuable policy insights and make useful policy recommendations.

Chapter four will try to gather evidence to justify the need for rigorous theorisation in the field of intelligence studies in India. In this, I will make some imperative review of literature essential to have a clear understanding about the state of intelligence studies in the country. Next, I will analyse the perceptions of intelligence producers and consumers about what constitutes intelligence and intelligence failures. Here, I will also analyse a few theories explaining intelligence failures in the West.

In chapter five, I will focus on making a critical analysis of two intelligence review committees taken for analysis — the Ram Pradhan Committee and the Kargil Review Committee. Later, I will compare the two to understand the state of intelligence inquiry and reform making in the country.

In the next two chapters that follow, I will try to bring some definitional clarity to a few concepts in intelligence studies and develop a framework for building a theory that can explain intelligence failures. I will test the theoretical framework developed in the earlier chapter by re-evaluating the failure to prevent 26/11 attacks.

Chapter eight will make a conclusive note and highlight the need for India's secret intelligence agencies to strike a balance between sharing and secrecy. In this chapter, I will particularly explain how the intelligence agencies and policy makers can help intelligence scholars build a theory to explain intelligence failures.

In the final chapter, I will recommend a set of intelligence reforms — which I think can help intelligence agencies avert future failures.

Limitations of the Study

There are some important limitations to this paper, as with any study. First, it is highly impractical to comprehensively catalogue in public the IB's or R&AW's record of failed judgments, the allegations aimed at them, and their responses in the way of remedial action. Second, the inferences made and recommendations advanced in the paper, therefore, are restricted by the limited exposure to classified and declassified documents on intelligence and the very secretive nature of national security intelligence that doesn't offer any scope to build definitive theories and doctrines on intelligence. Finally, a lack of sufficient evidence on intelligence working itself might also "lead to over-theorisation", which has remained a major setback for intelligence scholars across the globe.⁵

Moreover, the trouble in discerning the true intentions of the intelligence personnel in producing intelligence or that of a policy maker in carrying out reforms makes it tough to identify where the problem exactly lies. While it is not within the current research agenda to analyse why democratic governments are so tight-fisted in sharing even non-sensitive national security information with scholars, this is by far the biggest limitation of the paper.

⁵ See *Anthony Glees*, 'The Future of Intelligence Studies,' *Journal of Strategic Security*, 6 (5): 124-127, last accessed on September 5, 2013, at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol6/iss5/15>

Chapter 2

A Rationale for Theorising

The story of 26/11 is one replete with allegations of failure⁶ — failure to effectively process available intelligence, failure to share intelligence within agencies, failure to take strategic warnings seriously, neglect of open source intelligence, failure to strengthen sea patrolling, failure to understand the structure of anti-terror squads (ATS), failure to sensitise agencies about new terrorism, and failures to deal with lack of arms and ammunition, acute shortage of automatic weapons, non-availability of naval layout plans, and poorly equipped ATS. The biggest of them all was the failure to prevent Pakistani terrorists from making an amphibious landing onto the quayside of Mumbai on the night of November 26, 2008. Three days of siege followed as the world watched on television sets. The attacks quickly changed the security priorities of the country, like none other, and set in motion several intelligence and police modernisation reforms that were in the pipeline.

I

The Mumbai attacks unveiled a number of innovations in terrorist tactics. Numerous monographs, media reports and interviews assessing the causes and outcome of the failure to prevent 26/11 have exposed several other shortcomings within the Indian internal security architecture at the state and federal levels. Several Western academicians called the 26/11 attacks India's experience of 9/11. Given the colossal reforms brought about following the attack, there is nothing wrong about the reference.

However, the description of 26/11 as an intelligence failure is totally misplaced. The Indian intelligence community had uncovered numerous “red flags” prior to the 26/11 attack with dozens of alerts about the possibility of a *fidayeen* (suicide) attack, multiple sea-borne attacks and commando operations. However, such strategic intelligence warning did not lead to effective and speedy strategic response. In that case, is the 26/11 terrorist attack a failure of policy and not of strategic intelligence?

What do we know about intelligence failures? How often do we identify a failure to prevent a terrorist attack as an intelligence failure? Yet, how many terrorist attacks really happen because of a failure to produce sufficient intelligence? Are counter-terrorism failures failures of intelligence or failures to act on intelligence? As Prem Mahadevan points out in his book *Politics of Counterterrorism in India – Strategic intelligence and national security in South Asia*, “intelligence failure is a cliché that needs to be employed with great circumspection”. This lack of definitional clarity is solely because of one of the inherent weaknesses of the Indian intelligence community in not disclosing the nature of intelligence that was on hand, prior to an attack.⁷

Scholars analysing the failures of the intelligence community tend to advance several controversial arguments about the functioning of Indian intelligence agencies. For instance, the case that the “reluctance, and even refusal, to share information among intelligence and security agencies”⁸ being identified as the most weakening factor of Indian intelligence agencies is unsettled. Wilson John, a senior fellow at Observer Research Foundation, noted that this reluctance has been highlighted in a recent case where the IB failed to help the Karnataka police

⁶ The allegations listed above were pointed out by the Ram Pradhan Inquiry Committee.

⁷ It is because of the secretive nature in revealing sufficient information about the nature of intelligence that I was in no position to develop a database of past failures or identify a pattern in such failures of the intelligence community.

⁸ *Indian Express*, The intelligence failure: the buck stops nowhere, May 14, 2012, last accessed on September 15, 2013 on <http://newindianexpress.com/nation/article9991.ece>

identify how Riyazuddin Nasir, a motorcycle thief in Karnataka, could expose a HuJI network. This is probably a rare case that has exposed how spy circles in India continue to be reluctant to share such inputs. On the other hand, some others have argued that the tendency of a few intelligence agencies in resorting to shortcuts in assessments and the Indian government's trend to fake security preparedness have led to repeated failures.

Although the causes pinpointed in the above arguments are not explicitly linked to repeated failures of the intelligence community, academics and journalists are inclined to associate a failure to prevent a terrorist or militancy attack with improper sharing and coordination mechanisms in intelligence agencies. Such references tend to arise predominantly because "changing a culture of 'need to know' to 'need to share' does not come easily in spy circles".⁹

In fact, ever since the 9/11 Committee report has been made public, there has been a general trend to correlate terrorist attacks with failures of the intelligence community to adequately share information. The 'connecting the dots' metaphor is one we can find in every public debate in the US about a failure to avert a terrorist attack. The failure to avoid the Boston bombing from happening was also described in an analogous manner. Therefore, is it a valid argument to make in relation to what we call India's experience of 9/11 or for that matter any counter-terrorist failure?

In my opinion, the answer is no.

First, the use of the metaphor is thoroughly misplaced. This one is not appropriate in explaining intelligence failures, because it is not as simple as it may sound. It is legitimately impossible to discover how many potential 'dots' the IB, R&AW or let's say the NIA and the other agencies gather. Moreover, these dots are scattered everywhere, including a variety of intelligence databases, files and folders, e-mails and also inside different people's brains. While it is extremely simple to work backwards and observe loopholes in the system by analysing obvious warning signs, it is enormously difficult to analyse the millions of important and not-so-important dots of information to uncover terrorist plans.¹⁰

Second, as American cryptographer Bruce Schneier points out in a debate on why the FBI and CIA failed during the Boston bombings, "Focusing on it (the failure to 'connect the dots') will only make us implement 'useless' reforms."¹¹ This is because intelligence failures are essentially not just a failure to connect the dots. In any case, individual cases of failure to prevent terrorist attacks are neither a failure of intelligence nor a failure of policy, but a failure of intelligence networks to penetrate into terrorist outfits that plan such attacks.¹²

When a terrorist plot succeeds occasionally, it is not automatically because the intelligence machinery failed. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, the efficiency of the intelligence apparatus of a country also plays a role in determining its rise or fall. However, we also have to take into consideration that the risk of terrorism will remain in spite of how strong our intelligence and law enforcement agencies are.

II

The problem lies with how we approach the subject of counter-terrorist failures. Terrorist attacks in India, for the most part, have been examined as either strategic or tactical

⁹ Reuters, 'Post-9/11 US intelligence reforms take root, problems remain,' September 8, 2011, last accessed on September 15, 2013 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/08/us-sept11-intelligence-idUSTRE78714D20110908>.

¹⁰ Interview with former additional secretary, Cabinet Secretariat and R&AW, Jayadeva Ranade, New Delhi, August 8, 2013

¹¹ CNN, 'Why FBI and CIA didn't connect the dots,' May 2, 2013, last accessed on September 18, 2013 at <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/02/opinion/schneier-boston-bombing/index.html>

¹² Interview with terrorism studies expert, Ajai Sahni, New Delhi, August 7, 2013

intelligence failures. Seldom has there been any attention paid to the policy failures that precede them, or reform failures that follow them. The reason why failures of the intelligence community prolong even after systematic reform building is simply because studies on intelligence failures are fraught with questionable assumptions. The paper, therefore, attempts to address the lack of definitional clarity in intelligence studies by answering a few enduring questions: What are intelligence failures and why are there so many of them? What do we do about them?

Whenever a terrorist attack happens, faulty or inadequate intelligence is cited as a major cause, regardless of whether there happen to be policy failures. However, there are a few exceptions.¹³ As a consequence of linking terrorist attacks with inadequate intelligence, the argument of an existing intelligence system not being capable of dealing with immediate threats arises all the time. This unbalanced approach of routinely establishing a strong link between intelligence and counter-terrorism policy is due to the assumption that intelligence analysis normally influences policy decisions leading to a natural deduction that the availability of good intelligence can only lead to effective policies and vice versa. However, this is not to dismiss the need for more capable intelligence machinery.

The model inaccurately links flawed counter-terrorist policies to insufficient or erroneous intelligence. The helplessness of the intelligence community to defend any allegations of failure has only reinforced the claim made above.¹⁴ Such an unsound analysis will lead to questions such as why or how policy makers overlook available intelligence.

Similar arguments followed the recent Bodh Gaya serial blasts of July 2013,¹⁵ which adds to the overwhelming majority of failures that arose from the state's inability to process or unwillingness to follow up such intelligence warnings from the centre. The failure to 'connect the dots' has overwhelmed Indian intelligence agencies since the 1962 border conflict, the 1999 Kargil intrusion and the failure to prevent 26/11. Yet, have we learnt any intelligent lessons from the crises of yesteryears?

The principal debate among Indian intelligence scholars starts with the assumption that counter-terrorist decision making is influenced by intelligence analysis. This approach of studying a failure of the intelligence community involves evaluating the accuracy of the intelligence analysis and critiquing either the intelligence producer or policy maker for not providing or not acting upon provided intelligence. Though intelligence agencies do play a vital role in policy making, pursuing this kind of a research agenda can be extremely difficult given the secretive environment of national security intelligence. Further, it cannot offer holistic solutions to the problems of the community. Instead, as Henry Kissinger explains in his article on intelligence failures, "Resetting the priorities of intelligence and adapting to the new realities of terrorism must start with an understanding of the problems requiring solution."¹⁶

Besides shoddy tradecraft and problems arising from intelligence analysis, sources of intelligence failures may stem from a variety of factors, including (a) misunderstanding about what the intelligence community can reasonably provide and what some decision makers or

¹³ Prem Mahadevan skilfully dealt with the tricky subject of policy failures and political perspectives in intelligence in his book *Politics of Counterterrorism in India*.

¹⁴ As a former director of Intelligence Bureau points out in an interview, 'Success stories often go unreported because intelligence agencies often cannot reveal other spies.' In fact, 'only rogue agencies disclose'. (Name withheld for protecting identity)

¹⁵ On the basis of revelations made by alleged Indian Mujahideen terrorist Sayed Maqbool, the Delhi Police Special Cell had issued a warning in October 2013 that the banned outfit planned to target the Buddhist shrines in Bodh Gaya. The police claimed to have shared intelligence about a fidayeen (suicide) attack with the state agencies concerned nearly nine months earlier. There were at least two alerts issued to Bihar within the preceding three months warning of terror attacks in the light of the ethnic conflict in Myanmar. However, the local intelligence agencies and the government in Bihar were accused of failing to act on available inputs.

¹⁶ Henry Kissinger's article on *Washington Post*, 'Lessons from four failures,' August 16, 2004, last accessed on September 18, 2013 at <http://www.henryakissinger.com/articles/wp081604.html>

journalists expect, (b) organisational flaws within the community, and/or (c) implementation of faulty reforms.

III

The answer as to why there is very less definitional clarity — within intelligence studies in India — is evident from the lack of methodology-driven studies that address the real dilemmas of the intelligence community and theory-driven discourses that explain the intelligence failures. Several studies focusing on intelligence reforms have emphasised the need for the intelligence community to interact with citizens at multiple levels¹⁷, the need to provide for adequate whistleblower protection mechanisms for those who report orders perceived as illegal and the need for effective legal and parliamentary oversight systems to monitor the performance of intelligence agencies.¹⁸

The Indian intelligence system suffers from a lack of checks and balances and the consumer hardly gets the required intelligence product. The politicisation of some of the agencies has led to reduction of their efficiency. At times, intelligence agencies even tend to take upon themselves the task of decision-making rather than restricting themselves to the advisory role. “The bane of intelligence agencies has been the lack of focus and direction, turf-battles, poor coordination, uncorroborated reports and the lack of professionalism and motivation.”¹⁹

Looking at intelligence oversight structures in three countries, the US, UK and Australia, an issue brief by Danish Sheikh has outlined four levels within which effective oversight should operate in a democratic framework, namely the internal level, executive oversight, parliamentary oversight, and accountability by external review bodies. It indicated how the ‘intelligence community’ conceptualised by former R&AW chief Girish Chandra Saxena, can be fully realised only when internal organisation and their ‘taskings’ are managed in a thoroughly professional basis — their smooth coordination with minimal overlap ensured through the formulation of formal charters.”²⁰

It called for ‘a holistic approach to an intelligence policy which, while recognising the indubitable need for intelligence gathering, ... also highlighted the other factors that should comprise a worthwhile policy’.²¹

A workshop on *Intelligence failures in the US, UK and Russia* organised by Observer Research Foundation offered several lessons to deal with the failures of the Indian intelligence community. IDSA recently took an in-depth look at the problems facing the intelligence community and suggested a wide-ranging set of reforms to better equip the system to respond to the new threats of terrorism. Looking for a reason for stalled reforms, the Task Force report noted that ‘rigid and stodgy bureaucracy may have stood in the way of developing or enhancing the desired core competence in the field of intelligence analysis and operations’.

It identifies three factors that have worked against developing imaginative and unconventional intelligence reforms: (a) conflicting motivations of those considering reforms, (b) environmental challenges at initiation of reform, and (c) failure of leadership.

¹⁷ See Wilson John, ‘Intelligence agencies in India: Need for a public interface,’ *ORF Issue Brief*: 28, June 2011, last accessed on September 15, 2013, at http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/ORFIss28_1309513248636.pdf

¹⁸ See Danish Sheikh, ‘Locating India’s intelligence agencies – in a democratic framework,’ *ORF Issue Brief*, last accessed on September 15, 2013, at

¹⁹ See Anand, Vinod, ‘An integrated and joint approach towards defence intelligence,’ *Strategic Analysis*, Vol XXIV/8, (2000), p408-409

²⁰ Locating India’s intelligence agencies – in a democratic framework, p6

²¹ Ibid

To this, let me add (a) the lack of definitional clarity, (b) the failure to recognise the unspoken failures of the intelligence community and (c) the lack of sufficient theorisation in the field.

IV

The topic of India's unfinished internal security reforms has been repeatedly studied by several scholars in the aftermath of every major terrorist attack or intelligence review committee.²² However, rarely has there been any study to evaluate why this has been 'unfinished'. The 26/11 terrorist attacks prompted a huge security outcry and revealed the often ignored problems of security and intelligence. However, reforms advanced in the aftermath of the attacks did not stop another major terrorist attack from happening.

Several papers looking at the counter-terrorist failure of 26/11 have focused on the terrorist innovations witnessed during the attack, studied the immediate security response and analysed the continuing infirmities in the Indian security system. Often, it is surprising how the 26/11 attacks stirred up such huge proportions of intelligence reform whereas previous deadlier attacks did not. As a result, some scholars have examined the important strides in internal security reform since the 26/11 attack and analysed several factors that explain why it triggered more reforms than earlier attacks.²³

A study that addresses the cause-and-effect relationships between repeated counter-terrorist failures and the other malfunctions within the intelligence community is necessary to draw the right intelligence lessons. The first step towards achieving this is to look at different failures of the intelligence community as failures to produce (and analyse), adapt, reform and execute.

Very often, theories explaining intelligence failures advanced by politicians and intelligence review committees are weak, ambiguous and fail to address one core hiccup of the intelligence community. This failure to add causal weight to the several hypothesised variables often compels them into building too many recommendations for intelligence reforms. These reforms either don't get executed or get put into operation only in parts.²⁴

For instance, the Group of Ministers (GoM), which was formed in the immediate aftermath of the Kargil intrusions by Pakistan in 1999, made 300 recommendations, including the setting up of a marine police force for coastal states. Several scholars have often established a causal link between the non-implementation of that one recommendation and a failure to prevent 26/11. Though several other proposals for reforms made by the Kargil Review Committee were implemented prior to 26/11, the failure could not be averted.

The problem practically lies with the approach towards intelligence failures.

Over the past couple of decades, reform makers have endlessly resorted to 'meta-institutional reforms', which are initiated based on the premise that there is an intelligence coordination failure.²⁵ In fact, politicians, while arguing for or against such a reform to make an organisational change, are often driven by certain not-so-important power equations. There is hardly any debate in the nation about whether or not making wide changes in intelligence organisation can make any difference. This failure of intelligence review committees and political leaders to sufficiently explain failures and appropriately make proposals for intelligence reforms have been routinely overlooked as a possible cause for repeated failures of the intelligence community.

²² See Kanti Bajpai, 'Internal Security: The Indian Way,' *Strategic Analysis*, 34:5, 697-701

²³ See C. Christine Fair, 'Prospects for effective internal security reforms in India,' *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 50:2, 145-170

²⁴ See Praveen Swami, 'Stalled reforms,' *The Hindu*, May 9, 2003, last accessed on September 15, 2013, at <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=20030509002108700.htm&date=f12009/&prd=fline&>

²⁵ Interview with Sahni, New Delhi, 7 August 2013

In revisiting the intelligence failures — and the consequent reforms — of the past, including the failures to prevent the 1962 border conflict, the 1999 Kargil intrusions and the 26/11 attacks²⁶, the paper assesses the troubles in understanding the real problems of the intelligence community. Intelligence reforms are hardly intelligent.

V

The following paper looks at counter-terrorist failures through the lens of reform failure. I assert that there is sufficient reason to believe that certain causal elements of alleged intelligence failures reside more in the failure of the reform makers to make sensible reforms and in the failure of policy makers to implement them, than in the collection and analysis domain of the intelligence tradecraft. The perils of shallow theorising of intelligence failures by certain intelligence review committees are evident in the sweeping ‘meta-institutional reforms’²⁷ made over the past decades and the persistent failures of counter-terrorism and intelligence.

This paper advances three major arguments:

First, the proposed reforms of the past are insufficient²⁸ or overambitious²⁹, if not unrelated to the hypothesised causes of failure. The intelligence community influenced by a set of mindless politicians has continuously focused all its efforts in “prettifying the apex without bothering about the ground” — what with its meta-institutional reforms. The state of reform building in the country is beset with “imitative solutions looking at irrelevant models of the West”.³⁰

There is no shortage of schemes of reorganisation: the Kargil 1999, Ram Pradhan Committee of 2008 and Pradhan-Haldar-Narsimhan Committee of 2009 have all made plenty of proposals for such reforms. However, what is required at the present moment is a “pause for reflection” as rightly pointed out by Henry Kissinger in his article entitled *Lessons from four major failures*, published in Washington Post in 2004.

After every major perceived intelligence failure, there are several debates about revamping the intelligence apparatus. Structural reforms get implemented very often. However, systemic and fundamental changes do not happen very often.³¹ Second, no reforms have been made towards addressing the main predicament of the community, which clearly lies in its inability to recruit, retain and adequately train resilient minds to cope with the changing scene of transnational terrorism.³² Third, a major source of intelligence failures stems from a

²⁶ The paper examines the important strides in intelligence reform that India has undertaken in the aftermath of Kargil 1999 and 26/11. The two cases have been considered not just because of the intensity of the attacks, but because of the controversial reforms that were made following it.

²⁷ The terminology is adopted from the usage of terrorism studies expert Sahni who referred to sweeping organisational reforms as ‘meta-institutional’.

²⁸ Making an observation about the state of reform making in India, former director of R&AW Sood said in an interview that ‘reforms in the country have often focused on controlling the system, rather than addressing the deep-seated problems within the intelligence agencies’. Reforms, he insists, should be addressed ‘from the very bottom focusing on recruitment, training and curriculum for intelligence analysts’.

²⁹ For instance, V. Balachandran, a co-author of the Ram Pradhan Committee report, noted in an article entitled ‘*The signal through the noise- NCTC’s role in sifting through the intelligence glut*’, published in *Indian Express*, that the NCTC is a ‘needless irritant on Centre-State relations’. Further, he called the former home minister P. Chidambaram’s proposal on NCTC — with investigation and operations responsibility — as ‘overzealous’. During an interaction on September 5, 2013, he said that he had written several times earlier that the original version of US NCTC created in 2004 which P. Chidambaram and his team studied in 2009 did not have this role.

³⁰ Interview with Sahni, New Delhi, 7 August 2013

³¹ Former additional secretary (R&AW) Kalyan K. Mitra highlights the impromptu nature of intelligence reforming in India at a workshop on ‘Intelligence Failures in the USA, UK and Russia: Lessons for India’, Observer Research Foundation at New Delhi on October 20, 2004, last accessed on Aug 28, 2013, at http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/report/attachments/intlrep_1162888665766.pdf

³² Interview with a former Intelligence Bureau director, New Delhi, August 8, 2013 (Name withheld for protecting identity)

misunderstanding between what the intelligence community can legitimately provide and what policy makers or journalists expect from them.

The patterns that emerge from the failures of 1962 and 1999, as some academicians point out, largely exist at the intelligence analysis level. As Richard J. Heuer points out in his CIA publication *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, the inherent psychology of intelligence analysis can lead to unimaginative inductive reasoning. However, neither is deductive reasoning an appropriate method for intelligence analysis. “Sensitising intelligence professionals to social sciences methodology and cognitive barriers” may put an end to failures in analysis of intelligence and facilitate better anticipation of security threats.³³

Though faulty intelligence analysis could be the main causal factor relating to a failure to produce sufficient intelligence, it is not the only reason for repeated failures within the intelligence community. This research paper, therefore, tries to address the systemic failures of the intelligence community, including the failures to produce, execute, adapt and reform, with an intention to provide a direction towards meaningful reforms that should address both producers and consumers of intelligence.

Keeping in mind the limitations of the past research agenda, this policy paper will:

1. Examine the mission and constraints of the intelligence community,
2. Review the dominant discourses of intelligence failures of the past,
3. Analyse the practicability of certain recommendations for intelligence reforms in the past and present,
4. Study several other unspoken failures of the intelligence community, and
5. Offer a theoretical framework for a descriptive theory to explain how the Indian intelligence agencies make mistakes — of production, analysis, assessment and reform.

The long list of intelligence failures across the world offers ample motivation to believe that no matter how affluent a nation is, sporadic cases of counter-terrorist and intelligence failures are inevitable. Though secret intelligence fails no matter how prepared a country is, nations that have experimented with procedures of accountability tend to be better equipped than the rest. The US and the UK offer excellent examples to show how intelligence review committees influence major national security decisions. Nations that have politicians and scholars with a clear understanding of what certain national security and intelligence terminology mean are certainly better-qualified to assess such failures. While the need for a legal and parliamentary oversight in the country is widely discussed elsewhere, this paper looks for evidence to validate the latter argument.

By arguing the need for theorising, the paper is not urging for a binding doctrine on intelligence. In fact, it is fully conscious that the prospect of developing all-encompassing theory on/for intelligence is unworkable. On the other hand, the paper is only urging for a debate on how to analyse the failures of the intelligence community and therefore tries to deal with the problem of definitional clarity — a precursor to any theorising in the field.

³³ See *Srinath Raghavan*, Intelligence failures and reforms, *Seminar*, July 2008, last accessed on August 23, 2013, at http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/599/599_srinath_raghavan.htm

Chapter 3

Challenges Facing Intelligence Studies in India

Knowledgeable public debate on national security issues is often a casualty due to the lack of declassified documents on secretive or non-secretive information about the functioning and failings of intelligence agencies. In fact, the Indian government's policy of keeping most of such information permanently classified or declassifying only parts of such information has consistently resulted in a situation in which no authentic account of national security management can be presented. Routine declassification of such information in several Western countries has facilitated public debates in the subject and is clearly the motivation behind the rigour with which intelligence failures are analysed elsewhere. The sparing nature of the Indian government in sharing such information not only restricts serious scholarship in the subject, but also indirectly permits intelligence agencies to function without sufficient accountability.

However, the history of the Indian intelligence is full of alleged or demonstrated shortages. Routine intelligence review committees have taken place after every major perceived failure of the intelligence apparatus in the country, including the Henderson-Brooks Committee (Indo-China border war of 1962), B.S.Raghavan IAS Committee (Indo-Pak war of 1965 and Mizo revolt of 1966), L.P. Singh Committee investigating Emergency between 1975 and 1977, K. Shankaran Nair Committee constituted in early 1980s, Kargil Review Committee (Pak intrusion of 1999) and the Ram Pradhan Committee (Mumbai attack of 2008). Several reports have been developed to press forward proposals for intelligence reforms, including ones by the Pradhan-Haldar-Narsimhan task force and the FICCI task force of 1999.

Towards addressing the deficiencies highlighted by the Kargil Review Committee Report, the Government of India constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) to review the entire internal security scenario in the aftermath of the attack. The GoM was assisted by four Task Forces to focus on strengthening internal security, intelligence apparatus, border management and coastal security. The Task Force constituted to study and suggest improvement in the intelligence apparatus, led by Girish Chandra Saxena, made a variety of imperative recommendations, which were classified and have since been deleted.

The report of G.C. Saxena Special Task Force, set-up as part of the Kargil Review process, habitually identified as the "most enlightened document ever written on reforming India's intelligence apparatus", continues to remain classified. As strategic affairs expert Praveen Swami points out in an article entitled *Stalled Reforms*, published in *Frontline*, "the 244-page paper called on India's intelligence establishment to take an honest and in-depth stock of their ...challenges and problems." When an attempt was made to find out the 'status of classification' of the report, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had no information on it. There was neither any further response from MEA nor could former intelligence personnel help. However, the recommendations relating to intelligence put forth in the Group of Ministers (GoM) report gives a clear picture of the state of reform-making in the country.

Given the lack of transparency about intelligence activities, successes and failures in the country, it is astounding how at least parts of the report on the 1999 Kargil Review Committee and the High-level enquiry Committee (HLEC) on 26/11 are available in the public domain. Kargil was a significant blow to India's perception of external security, similar to what 26/11 did to the internal security scene. Several high-level military leaders and politicians have time and again described the Kargil disaster as India's Pearl Harbor and the horrendous 26/11 attacks in Mumbai as India's 9/11. Such academic understanding and comparison of these failures are good enough reason why this paper should consider these as case studies.

The lack of availability of some of the aforementioned reports has without doubt blurred the national security (and intelligence) management image of the country. Moreover, failures of

the intelligence community are often more publicised than intelligence successes in the country. The latest and most hyped intelligence coup is the one relating to the arrest of Yasin Bhatkal, who made bombs for a majority of the attacks orchestrated by Indian Mujahideen.³⁴

A former director of the IB says information relating to success stories is often not accessible to the public, because “there is a certain ethical constraint which restricts an intelligence official from revealing too much about an operation”.³⁵ Another former director of R&AW, Vikram Sood, elaborated the significance of “source bias and operational loyalty”.³⁶

Moreover, India’s central intelligence agencies, the IB or R&AW, do not reveal any figures about rates of successes or failures, even in the face of serious allegations. Sood clearly explains the actual predicament. “If the intelligence agencies were to say there were twelve operations of which ten were successful and two were not; questions about which two or which ten will arise.” Likewise, several other questions relating to why the ninth operation, for instance, was a failure or how the eleventh one was a success might arise. “Intelligence agencies often avoid such debates simply because this might require a revelation of operational details that even the Prime Minister doesn’t want to know.”³⁷

This makes it unfeasible for scholars to ask questions relating to the performance of intelligence services, such as what is the proportion of intelligence failures to successes, what their performance rate is or how the ‘sporadic yet broadcasted’ failures measure up to the actual current performance of intelligence services. In addition, former or serving intelligence personnel are extremely wary of revealing the real troubles of the intelligence community. Pursuing a research agenda to address the lack of sufficient dialogue between the producers and consumers of intelligence was a particularly challenging task. For instance, I found it particularly tricky to gather any evidence for one of my core research questions at the start of the project: Are inter-agency rivalries and failure to align thinking among intelligence agencies the reason behind repeated counterterrorist surprises? The Ram Pradhan Committee report revealed that the inherent flaw arose from the lack of a centralised sharing mechanism; due to which key information was either lost in transit or officials failed to ‘connect the dots’. Yet, such evidence is not adequate to claim that the lack of such a mechanism for sharing arises from an inter-agency rivalry. Likewise, it was exceptionally tough to find proof to confirm that alleged intelligence failures reside more in the failure of the producers and consumers of intelligence to engage in a continuous dialogue than in the collection and analysis domain of the intelligence tradecraft.

We need to urgently ask why the government and intelligence professionals do not provide the kind of data that might be useful in addressing a lot of problems within the intelligence community. As rightly pointed out by Professor Anthony Glees from the University of Buckingham, “The greatest challenge for intelligence studies is to surmount intellectual isolation by working together more systematically and less hierarchically — more workshops, more study groups, fewer large showcasing conferences.”³⁸

Despite such limitations within the literature pertaining to the functioning of intelligence agencies, a closer look into the functioning and reporting of the intelligence review committees of 1999 and 2008 can throw light on the state of intelligence reform building and security management, albeit to a limited extent. However, in-depth interactions with former intelligence personnel, academicians and politicians proved extremely useful in understanding why secret intelligence fails, repeatedly.

³⁴*The Hindu*, ‘A big blow to Indian Mujahideen’s bomb-making, recruitment skills,’ August 30, 2013, last accessed on September 28, 2013 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/a-big-blow-to-indian-mujahideens-bombmaking-recruitment-skills/article5072449.ece>

³⁵ Interview with former, IB Director, Delhi, August 8, 2013 (Name withheld for protecting identity)

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Interview with Sood, Delhi, August 8, 2013

³⁸ See Anthony Glees, ‘The Future of Intelligence Studies,’ *Journal of Strategic Security*, 6 (5): 124-127, last accessed on September 5, 2013, at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol6/iss5/15>

Chapter 4

What Do We Know About Intelligence Failures?

I. Historical Background of India's Intelligence Agencies

There are two central intelligence agencies in India — the Intelligence Bureau and the Research & Analysis Wing. Both agencies play a large part in keeping the country secure — from internal and external (and military) threats. Before the reorganisation of intelligence agencies in 1968, the Intelligence Bureau was responsible for both internal and external intelligence. The need for an effective intelligence network in India did not emerge until the Indo-China border conflict of 1962. It is only since the birth of Research and Analysis Wing in 1968 that the Intelligence Bureau was expected to collect intelligence within the country. It is henceforth identified as the premier agency for counter intelligence. On the other hand, “it is widely appreciated that the primary responsibility for collecting external intelligence, including that relating to a potential adversary's military deployment, is vested with the Research & Analysis Wing”.³⁹ However, both agencies play a major role in producing intelligence relating to counter-terrorism. Regrettably, the performance of both these agencies has been affected hugely by different sets of ‘unreasonable expectations’ from intelligence consumers in political, military and other circles.

The Intelligence Bureau has its roots in the policing system created by the British during their colonial rule and has ‘a mixed reputation’ among several Western intelligence agencies and their own consumers in India. While it has earned praise from their Western counterparts, the agency routinely comes under the scanner whenever there is a terrorist attack in the country, or when a major internal security threat goes unpredicted. Unfortunately, it is often considered as political machinery used to spy on opposition politicians rather than national security machinery to predict genuine security threats.

Intelligence agencies have faced routine allegations of intelligence failures and are regularly under the regulatory scanner for outdated surveillance equipment, lack of efficient online surveillance in the light of increasing technical sophistication of terrorists, lack of infrastructure and severe shortages in terms of trained manpower. The headquarters of the Intelligence Bureau's operations in New Delhi, the main part of the counter-jihadist wing of India's agencies, is poorly staffed with a reportedly meagre set of 30 analysts and field personnel. It was only in 2009 that former home minister P. Chidambaram authorised the hiring of 6,000 intelligence personnel, which barely covers the number of personnel who retire every year.

II. Traditional View of Intelligence Failure

The Indian roots of intelligence, statecraft and espionage date back to the Vedas and the Upanishads. The great epics of Indian mythology, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, provide an excellent introduction to the world of spying and offer numerous case studies of successes and failures of intelligence, and specifically, of spying. Although theories of intelligence might have existed in one form or another since the birth of the subject itself, it was not until Kautilya's *Arthashastra* — which had a unique influence over the rise of Chandra Gupta Maurya — that there was any written work on the art of collection of intelligence. In fact, a systematic translation of the ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, dating back to the 4th century BC, can provide a new direction for theory building in intelligence studies. However, there hasn't been any major effort towards that direction in India.

The study of intelligence failures dates back to several eras and is by far the most advanced field within intelligence studies. Many scholars have studied intelligence failures and

³⁹ See Kargil Review Committee Report (henceforth KRC report)

surprises and developed theories to explain disasters — ranging from Pearl Harbor to Cuban missile crisis of 1962 to the 9/11 and the recent Boston bombing. However, the systematic study of security lapses and intelligence failures in India existed only over the past two or three decades. Several books and research papers have been written to explain India's failures to prevent China's military intrusion of 1962 and Pak intrusion in 1999.⁴⁰ Several generations of scholars have laboured to extract what happened in the past, yet we don't seem to have learnt the right lessons.⁴¹ A failure to learn from the past failures is by far the biggest failure of the intelligence community.

Up until now, barely has there been any full-fledged effort to use earlier literature on intelligence failure to understand the current terrorist threat, except a few essays that try to learn from the surprise attacks of the past.⁴² Studies like these are probably few and far between predominantly because of the lack of open-source information relating to the working and functioning of intelligence agencies. This is pretty obvious from the current problems faced within the intelligence community.

Looking back at the Chinese intrusion of 1962, the main cause of the failure to prevent the border conflict was identified as "limited military intelligence, which led to the flawed threat assessment and the corresponding levels of security preparedness".⁴³ However, between April and October 2012, the Intelligence Bureau, which was responsible for providing external and internal intelligence during that time, reportedly produced regular assessments of the Chinese disposition. IB's own report of May 1962 allegedly indicated having learnt about Beijing's intention to forcefully remove Indian posts in Ladakh.⁴⁴ Further, IB argued that another report of September 1961 confirming occupation of Chinese posts along their 1960 claim line was not followed up.⁴⁵ Almost 50 years later, the Kargil conflict once again exposed a similar failure of the intelligence community — that of insufficient intelligence, analysis of available intelligence inputs, timely sharing of intelligence and corresponding follow-up by security forces.

In the months preceding the Kargil intrusion, several intelligence reports were circulated about a possible intrusion in the Kargil sector. In June 1998, the IB allegedly warned of increased activities along the border and reported 'increased movement' of Pakistan Army opposite the Kargil sector. However, this piece of intelligence was shared exclusively with the home minister and the director general of military intelligence, bypassing the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and the Research & Analysis Wing.

The inputs were consistent with the military intelligence available in the aftermath of the nuclear tests of May 1998. R&AW foresaw a limited offensive threat as Pakistan was bent upon interdicting the Dras-Kargil highway by means of increased shelling. However, neither R&AW nor JIC were in a position to make any further clarifications. After the Kargil intrusion in 1999, enquiries by Kargil Review Committee identified that 'the critical failure in intelligence was related to the absence of any information on the induction and de-induction of battalions and the lack of accurate data on the identity of battalions in the area opposite Kargil during 1998'.⁴⁶

As former intelligence personnel and strategic affairs expert B.Raman noted in his paper entitled *Dimensions of Intelligence Operations* that there is an "unfortunate awareness" among the general public that "the Kargil conflict of 1999 was a case of intelligence failure by the R&AW. It

⁴⁰ See Prem Mahadevan, 'The perils of prediction: Indian intelligence and the Kargil crisis,' *Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, No. 29, (2011)

⁴¹ Intelligence Failures in the USA, UK and Russia: - Lessons for India, ORF Workshop, New Delhi.

⁴² See Srinath Raghavan's essay on 'Intelligence failures and reforms' that throws light on some of the pressing issues of the intelligence community by drawing on the history of intelligence failures in India. In particular, it examines why New Delhi failed to anticipate the 'surprise attacks' by China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1999.

⁴³ Kapil Kak, 'India-China war of 1962: Higher defence management: Then and now,' *CLAWS*, (2012), accessed on August 28, 2013 at <http://strategicstudyindia.blogspot.in/2013/01/india-china-war-of-1962.html>

⁴⁴ See Srinath Raghavan, 'Intelligence failures and reforms,' *Seminar*

⁴⁵ See B.N. Mullik, 'My Years With Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal,' *Allied Publishers*, Bombay, 1970, pp. 329-30.

⁴⁶ KRC report

was not". As he highlights, a careful reading of the Kargil Review Committee report shows that there has been no reference of the term 'intelligence failure'; however, the report has "drawn attention to serious deficiencies at various levels in the intelligence and operations process".

Ever since the Kargil Review Committee report has been made public, intelligence failure has been linked to a failure to produce adequate intelligence, failure to process available analysis and failure to initiate follow-up action even on limited intelligence that was available. Much emphasis was placed on the tactical 'failure to connect the dots'. However, the Kargil debate also focused on redefining the role and responsibilities of some intelligence agencies over the other, and consequently called attention to the 'turf wars' between these organisations.

But, is it the most significant 'intelligence' lesson we can learn about the failure to prevent the Kargil intrusion?

III. Intelligence Failures: The Consumers' Perspective

Politicians of ruling parties have often faced the brunt of most failures of counter-terrorism than anybody else in the country, because of the conventional view that intelligence analysis is influenced by political leaders in power. Debates relating to terrorism and intelligence arise all the time, and predictably, politicians often tend to protect the intelligence agencies in such a discussion.

In recent years, the following acts of terror have been conducted on Indian soil: Mumbai 26/11, 2009 Guwahati bombing, 2010 Pune bombing, 2010 Varanasi bombing, 2011 Mumbai bomb blasts, the Delhi bombing of 2011, 2012 Pune terror attack, 2013 Dilsukhnagar blasts, 2013 Bangalore blasts and the most recent 2013 Bodhgaya blasts. A review of political responses to these attacks shows that there has been a general trend among politicians to correlate intelligence failures with the reluctance of intelligence agencies to share information or investigate further, or the failure of the state government to implement or act on the intelligence that was made available by central agencies.⁴⁷ This has been the case ever since the Ram Pradhan Committee report was made public. It is unfortunate to note "that the political discourse in the country is extremely irresponsible when everybody jumps the gun".⁴⁸

However, despite what the hypothesised cause of failure is, debates relating to organisational reforms take place all the time. This trend was pretty evident in the aftermath of the 2011 Mumbai attacks, when the debate on reorganising the national intelligence structure in the country was rekindled. It is understandable because the city of Mumbai witnessed a major incident of terror despite the rapid overhaul of the intelligence and security apparatus in the country. Predictably, several politicians hypothesised the delay in implementing the NCTC as a major causal factor for the failure to prevent the 2011 terror attacks. However, it was not identified as an intelligence failure.

Former home minister P. Chidambaram said there was "no failure of intelligence, because there was no intelligence". In a media response, he confirmed that "having no intelligence in this case, however, does not mean that there was a failure on part of the intelligence agencies".⁴⁹

His argument partly was in agreement with the philosophical case made by Richard K. Betts, a recognised American scholar specialising in national security issues, in saying 'intelligence failures are not only inevitable, they are natural'. However, P. Chidambaram did not have any case in the first place, as he did not hold anyone accountable for the attack. This sort of lack of definitional clarity is probably one of the major obstacles in making useful and realistic proposals for reforming the intelligence apparatus.

⁴⁷ The review is based on a series of news reports by The Hindu

⁴⁸ Interview with Manish Tewari

⁴⁹ *India Today*, "Mumbai blasts: Chidambaram denies intelligence failure," July 15, 2011, last accessed on September 28, 2013 at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/mumbai-blasts-chidambaram-denies-intelligence-failure/1/144890.html>

Terrorism studies expert Ajai Sahni conflicted with the former home minister's comments in an interview with Karan Thapar. He noted that the case of 2011 clearly manifests "the failure to create an intelligence network across the country, which would be able to penetrate and dismantle the networks that are creating these incidents". Responding to the unacceptable approach to failures of intelligence, he emphasised the need to evaluate an instance of intelligence failure "in terms of intelligence capabilities and mandate".⁵⁰

Barring the 2010 Pune blasts, roughly all other counter-terrorist failures were viewed as cases of inadequate intelligence or improper sharing and coordination of intelligence. Dismissing allegations of intelligence failure in the Pune blasts, P. Chidambaram noted that the attack was not a case of intelligence failure. He said that because intelligence inputs were taken seriously, the police had been sensitised about the likelihood of the attack and security measures were in place. The attack was, therefore, characterised as a case of 'an insidious planting of a bomb' which made it impossible for the intelligence agencies to predict accurately.

Ever since the Ram Pradhan Committee report was made public, the political rhetoric on counter-terrorist failures routinely avoided the reference of 'intelligence failure'; and when it did, it constantly identified the intelligence failure as a tactical failure of state intelligence agencies 'to connect the dots'. The Indian government identifies most cases of counter-terrorist attacks not as a failure to collect intelligence, but as a failure to integrate and understand available intelligence. This approach is extremely biased, as it ignores other possibilities.

On the other hand, there are a set of well-informed politicians who understand the constraints within which intelligence agencies operate. I spoke to former home secretary, Gopal Krishna Pillai, and the present Information and Broadcasting minister, Manish Tewari, to get a better perspective of some 'pro-intelligence' politicians. Speaking to Tewari was of particular significance because he presented the Intelligence Services (Powers and Regulation) Bill in the Lok Sabha in 2011 "to regulate the functioning and use of power by the Indian intelligence agencies within and outside India and to provide for the coordination, control and oversight of such agencies". Pillai was extremely insightful as he took over as Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2009, in the aftermath of the 26/11 attacks.

Tewari says, "Intelligence is neither a perfect nor an imperfect science." Noting that intelligence is all about a 'preponderance of probabilities', he explains the tricky circumstances that intelligence personnel have to deal with during a pre-warning stage. "At times, you are able to lay your hands on an input which you can develop that can tangibly lead to pre-emption. At times, you are not able to develop inputs which can lead to intelligence. At several other times, you are caught up in the dark. You have no prior information of something that is going to happen for the simple reason that a conspiracy to create a criminal act by its very nature is conceived in darkness and implemented in secrecy. It is that opacity that you are trying to pierce."

Calling for a need to understand the "asymmetry" with which the intelligence community has to operate, he says that intelligence production and analysis is a very challenging task. Instead of routinely accusing intelligence agencies for alleged failures, "what we really need to focus on is how to build their capacity and to establish a modicum of accountability for the functioning of these agencies".

Both Tewari and Pillai sympathised with the unfortunate plight of India's secret intelligence agencies and noted that it is only at times when the intelligence agency slips that we get to know about it. According to Pillai, the repeated failures of the intelligence community (he likes to call it lapses) are primarily because the number of intelligence personnel is extremely low and it takes several years to hire and whet personnel. He noted that it was only subsequent to the 26/11 attacks, that the government "found that we (Intelligence Bureau) were short of as much

⁵⁰ *CNBC TV18*, "Mumbai blasts: Failure of intelligence?" July 15, 2011, last access on September 28, 2013 at http://www.moneycontrol.com/news/current-affairs/mumbai-blasts-failureintelligence_565777.html?utm_source=ref_article

as 2,000 intelligence personnel”. While the agency only has “a capacity to hire and train only up to 150 to 200 such personnel a year”, he said each of them will have to undergo at least five to seven years of training before they are ready to be used in the field.

A politician’s perception about intelligence is often influenced by media leaks about the nature of intelligence that was available to state or central governments prior to a terrorist attack. Political oversight of intelligence agencies can offer a clearer picture about the failures of the intelligence community. However, the lack of methodology-driven studies on intelligence and the absence of scholar-policy interactions in the field are the main reasons behind weak, unsubstantiated theories advanced by certain politicians.

IV. Political Debate About NCTC

Such inappropriate theorisation of a few politicians has also led the debate about the setting up of NCTC to a totally different direction. In 2009, former home minister P. Chidambaram said the organisation’s goals will include “preventing a terrorist attack, containing a terrorist attack, and ...responding to terrorist attacks”. According to the initial proposal, he wanted all agencies involved in counter-terrorism intelligence gathering to report to the proposed NCTC.

According to the 2012 executive order, the NCTC was meant to work as an integral part of the Intelligence Bureau and was given powers of ‘arrest, search and seizure’. However, the latest ‘watered-down’ draft of the NCTC said it will work directly under the Home Ministry and not the IB. Besides, when a terrorist or a terror group is identified or located, operations against them would be carried out through or in conjunction with state police.

In light of the Dilsukhnagar blasts in February 2013, the debate over the creation of NCTC was ignited. However, there is still no political consensus on the watered-down proposal of NCTC.

According to several media reports, the government has decided not to go ahead with the proposed NCTC after facing strong opposition from Chief Ministers of several states, including those of West Bengal, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Assam.⁵¹ Immense support for NCTC came from the state of Andhra Pradesh in the aftermath of the Dilsukhnagar blast.

Though there was some anxiety about over-centralisation of intelligence agencies initially, the organisational reform faced stiff hostility because states considered the NCTC as an encroachment upon their law and enforcement powers and in conflict with the federalism features enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Yet, none of these oppositions focus on the actual problem. This is primarily because security is still compartmentalised in India. However, the reason why there is no consensus among states is because there can be no security reform in an ‘environment of mistrust’ between the central and state governments. Past studies assessing the problems of NCTC have all uniformly highlighted the need for establishing a legal framework for intelligence agencies and the need for holding them accountable.

Going forward, political leaders ought to ‘set aside their egos’ and question the requisite for such organisational reforms. The most pressing question that must steer political debates in the future is whether such a sweeping reorganisation of the intelligence community is required for fixing the problems of repeated failures. However, such informed debates relating to intelligence failures calls for a clear understanding of what intelligence and intelligence failures are in reality.

V. Intelligence Failure: The Producers’ Perspectives

⁵¹ In his concluding remarks at Wednesday’s Chief Ministers’ conference on internal security, home minister, Sushilkumar Shinde had said that a decision on setting up of the controversial National Counter Terrorism Centre will be taken only after full consensus.

The source of intelligence failure resides not only within the boundaries of the intelligence producers but also in the inaction of policy makers to react on the intelligence made available, the intelligence community's inability to adapt to the changing faces of terror, and the reform maker's failure to make appropriate proposals of intelligence reforms. Yet, in the event of a counter-terrorist failure, the producer of intelligence is indicted for most of the failures, while they are the ones who barely get an opportunity to defend themselves.

Contrary to the intelligence consumer's perspective highlighted in the above chapter, the reason for repeated failures within the intelligence community in reality is rather different. As part of my fieldwork, I had an opportunity to interact with several former intelligence personnel, former and current government officials and a few academicians who openly shared some intriguing inside stories about the working of intelligence agencies and helped me understand why India's secret intelligence agencies fail repeatedly.

A single strand of thought that emerged from most of my interactions is that India has "failed to implement any meaningful internal security reforms since 1947".⁵² The story of intelligence reform is far from complete.

Even if some reforms were sensible in fixing a few troubles of the intelligence community, reform makers have not been able to mend the core predicaments of the community because of (a) a failure to make any post-event audits⁵³, (b) lack of professionalism and systematised functioning⁵⁴, (c) communication gap between producers and consumers of intelligence⁵⁵ and lack of protocol for engaging and de-engaging,⁵⁶ (d) failure to implement reforms to recruit and train intelligent personnel⁵⁷, (e) failure to improve the working of intelligence personnel and (f) failure to adequately strengthen local intelligence.

In the pages that follow, I will discuss each of these failures independently, and consequently expose the dangers of constricted reform making.

VI. Failure to Implement Meaningful Reforms

India's agencies are facing two types of failures in relation to intelligence reforms — failure to make meaningful reforms addressing the urgent predicaments of the community and failure to implement useful reforms that were advanced as a result of past intelligence review committees.

In an honest confession about the real problems of India's agencies, V.Balachandran, former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, and member of the Ram Pradhan Committee, set-up in the immediate aftermath of 26/11, noted that "we have missed several opportunities to reform our internal security by studying the measures taken in other countries".

Moreover, he said India has failed to implement any "meaningful reforms" since 1947. In specific, he pointed the following cases, where individual states played a role in the implementation failure in the past:

1. In 1972, the Intelligence Bureau had suggested that the anti-hijacking squads then being set up in several airports should be handed over to the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF). All the states turned down this suggestion till they were forced to hand over airport security to CISF in the wake of IC 814 hijacking in December 1999.
2. In 1974, the Rustamji Committee recommended a separate maritime force like BSF to guard our sea border. It is an open secret that 26/11 attacks could have been prevented

⁵² Interview with V.Balachandran, Mumbai, August 9, 2013

⁵³ Interview with former additional secretary, Cabinet Secretariat and R&AW, Mr. Jayadeva Ranade, and former director, R&AW, Vikram Sood, New Delhi, August 8, 2013

⁵⁴ Interview with Sood

⁵⁵ Interview with Ranade

⁵⁶ Interview with a former director, IB, New Delhi, August 7, 2013

⁵⁷ Interviews with Sood and former (unnamed) IB director

had there been one such agency like in several other countries like Israel, the UK or even America.

3. It needed the assassination of our Prime Minister in 1984 to set up a special force to protect Prime Ministers, which was earlier inadequately carried out by the Intelligence Bureau, Delhi police and local police.
4. When the Railway Ministry suggested empowerment of the RPF to investigate cases on the railways, it was shot down by the MHA and the States although the highly fragmented State Railway police systems under 28 states often spar among themselves over jurisdiction.

While there has been delay in implementing several such reforms, what we continue to lack is level-headed intelligence reforms addressing ground-level problems. Several former intelligence personnel, including Vikram Sood, Jayadeva Ranade, K.V. Thomas and terrorism studies expert, Ajai Sahni, and another former IB director (name withheld) have amply provided evidence to prove the case.

VII. Failure to Address Problems at the Base

While V. Balachandran clearly highlighted the ‘lack of sensible reform making’ in the country, Sahni explained where the actual trouble lies. He noted that “the whole problem is with the approach” of certain reform makers. Over the past decade and a half, reform makers have focussed on making ‘meta-institutional reforms’, which according to him are instigated on the premise that intelligence failures predominantly arise from coordination failures. Dismissing that a counter-terrorist failure emerges from an intelligence agency’s failure to coordinate and share intelligence, he says: “Nobody in the intelligence business would offer an evidence of a case where a piece of intelligence input was not shared within intelligence agencies and the policing community – which is the essence of a coordination failure.”

Observing the bad influence of American intelligence reforms, he says that Indian policy makers ‘unfortunately pick these ideas from the Western experience’. The crisis in America, he notes, is “the overwhelming flow of intelligence and the inability to extract the most relevant information which will be operationally relevant and which will be able to be shared immediately”. This, for certain is not our problem, in India.

Our problem, he says, is “the absolute dearth of intelligence”. What are we to coordinate when we don’t have anything? Making an argument against the proposed NCTC, he notes “the core problems in India are to do with the capabilities at the ground level and are not anything to do with these institutional and organisational reforms”.

VIII. Failure to Formulate Reasonable Expectations

Intelligence personnel often argue that allegations of intelligence failure predominantly arise because of the failure to establish what the intelligence producers can legitimately provide. It is due to a lack of understanding from the consumers of intelligence and the journalists that the intelligence community gets routinely blamed for every counter-terrorist failure.

“It is unfair to expect all intelligence to be complete,” exclaims Sood. He says it is particularly unreasonable “especially when we are dealing with immediate issues — such as terrorism”. He explains that it might be easy to predict — from a geopolitical angle — about how China or India would react to its enemies ten years from now.

However, it becomes “extremely difficult to gather intelligence about enemy action, especially when he is too near”. When the enemy action is expected tomorrow, he notes that intelligence personnel at ground zero can only offer intelligence about enemy action based on mere observation. It gets difficult for someone to predict whether or not an enemy would start firing.

IX. Failure to Train and Recruit Resilient Minds

The numerous proposals for ‘meta-institutional reforms’ in the past, including NTRO, NATGRID, NCTC, have all exposed the improper approach of reform makers in constantly ‘focussing on the apex and ignoring the ground-level’. In a country with a massive population like India, capacities for response and data generation are far more important and are the base of the pyramid. “Unless you have that, you cannot have the apex of the pyramid hanging in the air.”⁵⁸

In reality, reforming the intelligence apparatus “does not (only) mean creating newer organisations or giving more money”.⁵⁹ What we clearly lack are reforms that start at the bottom level. There have been barely any reforms that aim at “improving the intelligence curriculum, training, in-service improvement, hiring procedure or promotion policy”.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, even the intensity of training in certain intelligence agencies has deteriorated over time, as former R&AW official Ranade notes. “We are not intense right now — relating to the kind of people they are taking in and the kind of places they are taken from.”

Moreover, the handicap in a system like India is with whetting. It takes intelligence agencies (specifically, the R&AW) almost a year before they whet a person. In a span of one year, Ranade worries there might be a higher turnout.

Further, intelligence services in India are rarely looked upon as organisations that lure individuals. Explaining the sad state of agencies in India, Ranade notes how working in secret agencies like the CIA or the MI6 is a badge of honour. But, the scenario is very different in India. He attributes a lot of this to old police colonial legacy. Moreover, he noted, “a lot of journalists and communists have a leftist attitude and have a negative view about the police”. And, this is one reason why the image of intelligence agencies in India doesn’t match up to their Western counterparts.

X. Inter-agency Rivalry

As several earlier studies have highlighted, there is a serious ‘cultural problem’ within the Indian intelligence agencies. In a candid interaction, several former intelligence personnel agree that one of the main reasons for intelligence and counter-terrorism failures is the rivalry among intelligence agencies. A former intelligence personnel, S⁶¹, said, “The same set of informers operate among different intelligence agencies — like BSF, military, army, navy, IB, R&AW — to infiltrate into the same terrorist outfits. All intelligence agencies focussing on counter-terrorism intelligence are all poaching into the same set of experts and, as a result, the same intelligence is peddled in different ways to the different agencies.”

In fact, former chairman of the JIC, S.D.Pradhan, also highlighted a similar problem in his article entitled *Indian intelligence system needs urgent reforms*, published in the Times of India immediately after India’s intelligence agencies publicised a huge success story relating to the arrest of three wanted terrorists, namely Abdul Karim Tunda, Yasin Bhatkal and Assadullah Akhtar. He noted that a situation where faulty intelligence is provided by all agencies raises the question whether “only one source was providing inputs to all agencies”. Such a situation calls for serious examination of the functioning of intelligence agencies.⁶²

In a country where credit snatching often influences intelligence analysis and dissemination and intelligence personnel suffer from a “crab mentality”, i.e., there is no way to

⁵⁸ Interview with Sahni

⁵⁹ Interview with Sood

⁶⁰ Interview with Sood and D.R.Karthikeyan

⁶¹ Name withheld for protecting identity

⁶² *Times of India*, ‘Indian intelligence system needs urgent reforms,’ September 15, 2013, last accessed on September 25, 2013 at <http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/ChanakyaCode/entry/indian-intelligence-system-needs-urgent-reforms>

judge the accuracy of intelligence produced. Furthermore, as agencies believe that ‘information is power’, they rarely reveal their sources when they provide intelligence alerts or warnings. This often leads to questioning the authenticity of an intelligence warning.

Further, the problem also lies in the intelligence culture, and more clearly in defining the function of intelligence in India. For instance, we are not a security state like the Americans, the Israelis or the British. While they view intelligence as an aid to state power, India does not. Historically, in India, intelligence was a function of the empire. In free India, intelligence continued to primarily cover political opposition and communism. We (Indians) thought political opposition, like the British did, was important for the survival of the government. Unless the culture of intelligence is changed from a ‘need to serve the government’ to a ‘need to serve the nation’, there can be no real transformation.

XI. Dialogue Failure

While the inter-agency cultural rivalries remain to be addressed, the deeper reason for the repeated failures of the intelligence community is a failure to align thinking among different agencies. There is reason to believe that certain causal elements of counter-terrorist and intelligence failures reside in the “failure of the producers and consumers of intelligence to engage in a continuous dialogue”, Ranade confirms. This failure was highlighted during the 26/11 attacks, he says.

Generally, when an intelligence input relating to terrorism comes from an external source, it is generally procured by R&AW and then shared. Two things happen. First, the piece of input is subject to analysis depending on the nature of the intelligence. Second, R&AW, like any other organisation, or human — with an intention to be the first to share — immediately shares it with the MHA, and thereafter, with the Multi Agency Centre (MAC). Finally, the rest of the community evaluates it, after which the MAC decides whether or not it should send it to the state concerned. Often, there is no problem within MAC. However, sometimes, “MAC will not assess the criticality of the information — the value or importance of the information.”⁶³ Here’s where the problem starts.

Explaining how one can avert such failures in intelligence flow, Ranade says, “It is the responsibility of the intelligence organisation which initially sourced the piece of information — which it thinks is sufficient to predict an attack — to send it to the targeted state, which MAC will probably do. But, they should follow it up. This is one area where there is laxity (in communication).”

In his opinion, the intelligence agency should take up the responsibility to chase the states concerned and question follow-up action. This is particularly crucial because “if the importance of the piece of intelligence is not expressed during dissemination, there might be a tendency, (among law enforcement agencies) to act on it in a relaxed manner”.

XII. Failure to Make Post-event Audits

One of the major setbacks of intelligence agencies is its failure to do post-event audit and aftermath analysis. While most agencies do not subscribe to it, Ranade and D. Sivanandan argue for the need of such independent audits. “Though agencies often dismiss such failures by passing the buck towards insufficient manpower, it is essential to evaluate an agency’s performance in preparing intelligence estimates prior to an attack,” says Ranade.

For instance, when an X agency sends 300 threat warnings prior to an attack, it must sit back and get one of the intelligence personnel — not associated with the operation — to independently evaluate (1) how many of those 300 warnings have been shared with local intelligence agencies, (b) how many of those 300 warnings have been stopped at the level of

⁶³ Ranade pointed out how the inefficient working of MAC was apparent during the 26/11

MAC after initial scrutiny and (3) how many of those 300 warnings have been used to avert the attack.

Such an approach will not only help the intelligence agency assess its own ability to gather and analyse accurate intelligence, but will also highlight any failure in sharing or coordination.

XIII. Failure to Build Capacity at Ground Level

One of the major findings of the Ram Pradhan Committee in the aftermath of the 26/11 attacks was the low capacity of trained manpower in IB and local intelligence agencies to analyse bits of intelligence scattered everywhere. The GoM set up by the Kargil Review Committee made several recommendations, including a proposal for a Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI) whose primary role was to strengthen local intelligence. Most DGP conferences also routinely recommended that the state intelligence apparatus have to be strengthened to ensure an effective internal security apparatus. In line with its primary role to strengthen state intelligence apparatus, the JTFI planned to strengthen the state intelligence, albeit with a handful of training centres. However, as strategic affairs analyst Praveen Swami noted in an article entitled *Stalled reforms*, the finance ministry shot down the request. In the post-26/11 era, as Swami observes, “The MAC at least has one office; the JTFI does not have even that.” Had the intelligence community recognised such lack of trained analysts at state level, the 26/11 attacks could have been averted.

However, another problem relating to manpower trouble relates to the number of intelligence personnel gathering intelligence relating to counter-terrorism. The proportion of such personnel to ones gathering other kinds of intelligence, including political espionage, is extremely worrying. In fact, Sahni confirms: “While the IB has a total strength of 19,000 personnel, only a few hundred personnel are concerned with counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism. Moreover, between 2008 and 2013, we have not strengthened the IB by even a few dozens. For a country of more than a billion, it is laughable!”⁶⁴

One of the other main failures pointed out by the Ram Pradhan Committee related to the over-dependence on central agencies for intelligence relating to terrorism. Among the different levels of intelligence agencies in the country, “the best agency which can most effectively deal with the subject is the state intelligence set-up with grassroots level linkages and close connections with local police stations. On the other hand, IB and R&AW only have skeletal presence at the district levels, which are of no use.”⁶⁵

However, our capacity of intelligence gathering in the ground has been systematically destroyed. “For decades, investments on policing have been regarded as non-developmental.”⁶⁶

XIV. State of Intelligence Studies in India

The difference in the perspectives discussed in the above chapters clearly indicates a producer-consumer divide about what constitutes intelligence and intelligence failures. However, the failure to establish a clear understanding of such terminology is also because intelligence within terrorism studies in India has occupied a marginal position in mainstream academic circles. Whatever has been published so far on the Indian intelligence community is either narrative or descriptive.

Only a handful of academics in India have toiled away individually to address the problems faced by the intelligence community. Even in such cases, hardly has there been any methodological study advanced towards theorising. On the other hand, the subject has been

⁶⁴ This statement was also verified by K.V.Thomas during an interview, where he said, ‘Out of the total of 15,000 intelligence personnel in the country, hardly 300 personnel have been deployed towards counterterrorism intelligence.’

⁶⁵ Interview with K.V.Thomas.

⁶⁶ Sahni, in an interview, noted that the chowkidar system set-up in colonial India is no more active.

dealt in a more organised way in the West and our political leaders have several lessons to learn from Western scholars. In the next part, I make a short review of a few prominent debates in the West to find some direction towards intelligence theory building.

XV. State of intelligence theorising in the West

Intelligence has been an academic discipline in the West for half a century,⁶⁷ and studies on intelligence failures have existed since Pearl Harbour days; however, the interest significantly increased in the aftermath of 9/11. It was not just because of the intensity of the attack, but also because of the controversial reforms that were made following it.

The principal debate among Western intelligence scholars, for the most part, exists around what 'intelligence studies' actually is. However, beyond definitional issues, the question of intelligence failures has remained clearly important as a subject of interest within intelligence studies, which often explicitly claim that the 'failures reflect the poor performance of the intelligence agencies as a whole'.⁶⁸

Roberta Wohlstetter's classic book *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* attempted to explain how even one of the most capable intelligence systems in the world can encounter surprise attacks 'in spite of the vast increase in expenditures for collecting and analysing intelligence data and advances in the art of machine decoding and machine translation'.⁶⁹ Several other scholars made several theories to explain other disasters, including but not the American intelligence failures in Korea and the Israeli surprise in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. While a majority of literature related to strategic surprises have been extremely pessimistic in claiming that in the difficult task of intelligence, failures are inevitable.

However, modern theorists have identified several causal factors for intelligence failures. The predominant distinction among these theorists often lies in the question of what or who causes intelligence failure. While most writers tend to believe that the fault lies with decision makers at the policy level, a small set of academicians tend to assign the fault to the intelligence community while a few others look at the deception of the enemy as a cause for surprise.

Richard K. Betts, for instance, made the case that few attacks can qualify 'as genuine bolts from the sky'. Most of them are preceded by some measure of pre-warning. Therefore, he wrote in one of his well-cited articles, 'Failures in intelligence are not only inevitable, they are natural'.⁷⁰ Later, in his book *Surprise Attack*, Betts elaborated his point about responsibility of decision makers in averting an attack: he noted that 'the principal cause of surprise is not the failure of intelligence but the unwillingness of political leaders to believe intelligence or to react to it with sufficient dispatch'. He made an argument that policy makers are often responsible for failure, for not having taken the advice given by intelligence. The proponents of this school, including former CIA analyst Paul Pillar and former CIA operative Amos Kovacs, many 'intelligence failures' are not so much failures of intelligence per se, but rather failures to use intelligence.

On the other hand, the school of organisational failure, advanced by Amy Zegart in her book *Spying Blind*, identifies two organisational deficiencies as the main causes of counter-terrorist failure: information sharing and strategic analysis — one of which has been the cornerstone of American intelligence reforms.

While both these causal factors — in the hypothesis of Betts and Zegart — are extremely useful in identifying the problems of the Indian intelligence community, "the reason for such

⁶⁷ David Kahn, "A Historical Theory of Intelligence," *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 16, No. 3, (September 2001): 79–92.

⁶⁸ John A. Gentry, Assessing intelligence performance, *The Oxford handbook of national security intelligence*,

⁶⁹ Roberta Wohlstetter's doctrinal conclusions in her classic book Roberta Wohlstetter, 'Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision.' (Stanford University Press. 1962.)

⁷⁰ Richard K. Betts, 'Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable', *World Politics* 31/1 (Oct. 1978) p.88.

failures in India is not caused by improper organisational management, but the unwillingness of the consumers of intelligence to take independent follow-up action".⁷¹ Further, the failure of the Indian intelligence community to adapt and make reforms is attributable to the bureaucratic nature of agencies and the self-interests of government bureaucrats, as Zegart rightly points out.

Besides addressing the failures of the intelligence community, studies in the West have often focused on questions of intelligence acquisition⁷², ethics in intelligence gathering⁷³, politicisation of intelligence⁷⁴, organisational failures of intelligence agencies⁷⁵, the role and structure of intelligence oversight⁷⁶, and relationships between intelligence agencies and the state.⁷⁷ There have also been several studies relating to 'the intelligence cycle and how it might be modified'.⁷⁸ Besides all these, scholars in the US and UK have also expressed concern about the theory-policy divide and have remained critical about the strained relationship between intelligence academicians and practitioners.

In an article entitled *The future of intelligence studies*, Anthony Glees noted, "The principal debates in intelligence studies in UK are currently concerned largely with the political accountability and oversight of secret intelligence agencies, their accountability and competence in terms of tradecraft, political skills and ethical values." Drawing lessons from recent examples in the UK, he noted that the UK currently faces big problems "in respect of making covert action accountable".⁷⁹

On the other hand, questions about the role of theory and its opportunities come up all the time. Scholars often wonder if they should try to develop a grand overarching theory or simply focus 'to generate theoretical bases for key areas of inquiry'.

The form of theorising in the West that most closely approximates to the professional world of intelligence has been either explanatory or problem-solving, but rarely predictive.⁸⁰

Theories answering empirical questions, such as why repeated failures happen or who is to be blamed for such failures, have been developed very often. Such a research agenda has led to a long and rich list of obstacles. For the most part, such kind of research helps arriving at similar causes for different cases. However, it will be useful to trace the specific effect of each of these causes of failure in order to facilitate better reforms — an issue this paper through its proposed model theory will seek to address.

⁷¹ See Prem Mahadevan, 'Politics of Counterterrorism in India: Strategic intelligence and national security in South Asia. (I.B.Tauris: London)

⁷² See Charles Cogan, 'Hunters not gatherers: intelligence in the twenty-first century', *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. XVIII/4 (2003), p42

⁷³ See Michael Herman, 'Ethics and Intelligence after September 2001,' *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 19, Iss. 2, (2004)

⁷⁴ Glenn Hastedt, 'The Politics of Intelligence and the Politicization of Intelligence: The American Experience,' *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 28, Issue 1, (2013), last accessed on August 28, 2013

⁷⁵ For instance, Amy Zegart points to bureaucratic resistance to reform and structural flaws within the US intelligence community as the main causal factor that prevent them from averting 9/11.

⁷⁶ See Peter Gill, 'Reasserting control: Recent changes in the oversight of the UK intelligence community,' *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 11, 2, (1996)

⁷⁷ See Stephen Marrin, 'Revisiting Intelligence and Policy: Problems with Politicization and Receptivity,' *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 28, Issue1, (2013)

⁷⁸ See Anthony Glees, 'The Future of Intelligence Studies,' *Journal of Strategic Security*, 6 (5): 124-127. Available at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol6/iss5/15>

⁷⁹ See Anthony Glees, 'The Future of Intelligence Studies,' *Journal of Strategic Security* Available at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol6/iss5/15>

⁸⁰ Loch K. Johnson and Allison M. Shelton, 'Thoughts on the State of Intelligence Studies: A Survey Report,' *Intelligence and National Security*, (2013), Vol. 28, No. 1, 109–120

Chapter 5

Critical Analysis of Intelligence Review Committees

I. Explaining the Failure of 26/11

Several scholars have dissected the 26/11 terrorist attacks to examine the performance of India's counter-terrorism intelligence agencies or to analyse the important strides in internal security reform. However, to my best knowledge, none have analysed the reports of intelligence review Committees to study the level of understanding of the problems faced by the intelligence community. And they have overlooked the deadly weaknesses in repeated organisational and institutional reforms.

An in-depth look at the Ram Pradhan Committee Report, which was generated in the aftermath of 26/11, can provide answers for why repeated counter-terrorist attacks happen in the country. By offering useful insight into the state of intelligence review committees and subsequent reform making in the country, the Report can — at several levels — help point and fix the dilemmas of the intelligence community. The theories advanced in the Ram Pradhan Committee Report and the subsequent reforms clearly point towards the failure to adequately assess its own problems.

II. Evaluating the 26/11 Ram Pradhan Committee Report

The Ram Pradhan Committee, a two-member High-level Committee headed by former Governor of Andhra Pradesh, R.D. Pradhan, and former special secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, V. Balachandran, was initiated in the aftermath of the 26/11 attacks to systematically evaluate the lapses in intelligence and law enforcement agencies and suggests measures to prevent events like 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

It accurately identified that the following have jointly led to the inability to prevent Pakistani gunmen from attacking the Mumbai city:

1. A 'glaring systemic loop hole' in the way intelligence is processed and shared between central and state agencies,⁸¹
2. A confusion in processing intelligence alerts,
3. The Maharashtra state government's neglect of useful open-source intelligence, and
4. Insufficient interagency coordination.

Additionally, in pinpointing the mistakes of the law enforcement agencies, the Committee found that the Mumbai Police was not sufficiently armed with the required arms and ammunition to respond to the fully equipped fidayeen-style terrorists. The report also noted that the delay of the police modernisation plan, the inflexible procurement rules for small and routine purchases of ammunition and the poorly equipped anti-terrorist squads (ATS) were all peripheral reasons for the failure.

Fifteen days after the 26/11 attacks, numerous recommendations were advanced to give a face-lift to the country's defence and intelligence gathering mechanism. It included proposals for setting up a National Investigation Agency (NIA), a federal agency to combat terror, a coastal military command, the INR 3,400-crore National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), a controversial anti-terror hub that was modelled after the US namesake, and the National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID), an intelligence grid that aims to link several intelligence databases to help aggregate comprehensive patterns of intelligence that can be readily shared and accessed by the entire intelligence community. Proposals were also made to strengthen the Multi Agency Centre (MAC), which had not been fully set in motion during that time. Besides this, there were

several proposals made to strengthen the security apparatus and equip the existing agencies with advanced technology to enable improved surveillance.

As a consequence, several improvements were made to make the security apparatus more effective. A number of regional hubs have been established for the rapid response NSG units as well as the creation of counter-terrorism schools. There has been an enhanced integrated approach between the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard, with a key achievement being the development of Joint Operation Centres under the control of Naval Commanders-in-Chief. To fulfil its expanding responsibilities, the Coast Guard has been strengthened with an additional 3,000 personnel at various levels. There has also been a marked improvement in capabilities, with a variety of fast patrol vehicles, interceptor boats, coastal surveillance aircraft and offshore patrol vehicles being procured.⁸²

While the NIA was immediately established by Parliament with the enactment of the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008, the NATGRID and NCTC are yet to be made operational. Most of the failures pointed out in the report and the reforms suggested after the inquiry committee have focused on correcting organisational weaknesses. However, the intelligence agencies are still left with the same set of problems since the Kargil crisis of 1999. Problems of 'lack of focus and direction, turf-battles, poor coordination, uncorroborated reports and the lack of professionalism and motivation'⁸³ persist. Probably, these organisational reforms are not the most suitable solutions to end the problems faced by the intelligence community.

III. Arbitration and Analysis

The Ram Pradhan Committee found that the existing intelligence analysis mechanism was inadequate to make an overall assessment of available intelligence warnings prior to the attacks. This made it impossible for the analysts to gauge the threat accurately and the policymakers to react to it. More professionalism within the intelligence community with better abilities to process intelligence for enhanced ground action would have revealed a strong indication that some major terrorist action was being planned against the Mumbai city. In simple words, the Indian intelligence community was unable to 'connect the dots' because the apparatus was not sufficiently equipped to handle mass volumes of alerts.

The assumption of the Committee that a lack of capacity to process intelligence has made it impossible for the intelligence community to predict the 26/11 terrorist attack is probably correct. Former home minister's proposal to create a National Counter-terrorism Centre (NCTC) almost certainly emerges from this assumption. Although there were repeated warnings from several agencies about a possible attack in Mumbai, our anti-terrorism squads (ATS) failed to extract focused intelligence from a mass of information and did not take sufficient steps to guard against a surprise attack of such greatness. As the committee points out, "The mode of attack and targets were correctly conveyed without an exact date." Specifically, the committee found that the dual control of the ATS was not working well. Such incomplete intelligence creates "serious difficulties for ground personnel" and therefore calls for "better intelligence processing".⁸⁴

What the Committee failed to point out, however, is the lack of sufficient conflict simulation and scenario building within our counter-terrorism intelligence agencies. The Indian intelligence community, for instance, does not sufficiently train its analysts to develop a deep analytical understanding of terrorist strategies to avoid failures of 'institutional imagination'.

The Indian NCTC, however, might not put an end to all confusion in processing intelligence alerts in future. Like the US and the UK, India too handled problems in intelligence processing through its joint intelligence committees (JIC) during Kargil days. The US, under the

⁸² After Mumbai – India's response, RUSI

⁸³ See Vinod Anand, 'An integrated and joint approach towards defence intelligence,' *Strategic Analysis*, Vol XXIV/8, (2000), p408-409

⁸⁴ Interview with V. Balachandran, Mumbai

Department of Homeland Security (DHS), created the NCTC in 2004 to do strategic operational planning to counter terrorism and assign roles to lead departments. Yet, it had no power to direct the execution of operations. Moreover, it communicated through 72 fusion centres, 27 of which were capable of directly receiving and circulating secret intelligence.

The Indian NCTC does not fully replicate its US counterpart. In India, the initial proposals on NCTC were made with an ‘overarching responsibility to perform functions relating to intelligence, investigation and operations for preventing, containing and responding to terror attacks’, which is awfully over-ambitious.⁸⁵ Though the proposal is extremely watered-down, it still might not serve as a practical reform to address the problem of analysis and ‘intelligence arbitration’.⁸⁶ In fact, without rigorous hiring procedures and improved professional training programs, an institutional reform of such stature may not help get to the bottom of the problem.

Besides this, the committee also pointed out a problem in relation to who processes routine intelligence alerts. The Ram Pradhan Committee was told that ‘under the “desk officer” system, intelligence circulars are directly received and processed by concerned “desk officer” who ... may or may not keep the higher officials informed’. In other words, there is no procedure to properly analyse the intelligence received, formulate a plan and act on it immediately. Though the committee acknowledged it as a ‘shocking revelation’, it has not explicitly made any proposal to handle such failures within the community.

If the intelligence community fails to address such organisational deficiencies, however trifling they may sound, repeated intelligence processing failures may never end.

IV. Sharing, Coordination and Integration

The Ram Pradhan Committee detailed a second theory of intelligence failure: that of failure of coordination and alignment in processing intelligence alerts at the state level. It observed a ‘glaring systemic loophole in the way intelligence from central agencies is processed at the state level’.

It also observed that counter-terrorism intelligence is handled by several officials leading to the problem of coordination and cohesion in thinking. The assumption of the committee that leadership weaknesses within the intelligence community have made it impossible for the system to make sound articulations is perhaps inadequately corroborated. The intelligence community was therefore unable to prevent the 26/11 terrorist attack not only because of an inability to process intelligence, but also because of a failure to develop a cohesive strategy between the agencies at the Centre and the state.

V. Over-dependence

The committee was careful to recognise that it would not be correct to conclude that the Mumbai police did not take available intelligence reports seriously. However, it pointed out that there is a tendency on part of local police to depend entirely on outside inputs for terrorism-related intelligence. As a matter of fact, it also indicated that the local police themselves are in a better position to collect local intelligence since they are in daily touch with their area. However, no reforms were advanced to strengthen local intelligence.

On a different note, the committee noted that the resources available with the Mumbai police weren’t adequate to conduct sea patrolling so as to intercept the boat used by terrorists, because of which nothing perhaps could be done on receipt of intelligence alerts relating to sea-borne attacks. Rigorous implementation of intelligence and coastal security reforms of the past would have put the intelligence and security agencies in a better position to promptly react and prepare for the upcoming attack.

⁸⁵ Interview with V. Balachandran, Mumbai

⁸⁶ As pointed out by the Ram Pradhan Committee Report, ‘Intelligence arbitration - a vital stage in intelligence processing that includes analysis and appreciation to operational units - is neglected.’

Besides all these, the over-dependence on central agencies, clubbed with a disregard for open source intelligence jointly contributed to the Mumbai police's inability to avert the attack. In fact, the committee also noted that the Mumbai police failed to analyse the capacity building by the terrorist groups concerned and their implications for Mumbai's own security following the Kabul Serena Hotel attack (January 2008) or Islamabad Marriott attack (September 2008).

This causal hypothesis in relation to the state government's neglect of open source intelligence was made with an understanding that open source intelligence acts as a valuable input for further tactical action and for drawing lessons. However, the committee did not dwell on the subject for too long and no reforms were made in this connection.

VI. Hits and Misses of the Ram Pradhan Committee

The 26/11 High Level Enquiry Committee (HLEC) is a little problematic on its own terms because of the gap between its weak theories and recommended reforms. The three main theories — of analysis, sharing and over-dependence — have all been poorly conceptualised. While the Committee accurately pointed out the intelligence community's lack of capacity to analyse, however, it failed to spot the root cause behind such a failure. Further, it is highly unlikely that any of the major changes, including the proposed NCTC and NATGRID, help generate the missing analytical imagination. And there is no reason to expect the organisational changes to stimulate imagination in the first place.

The theory of analysis and arbitration is especially unclear because it only mentioned that the community was unable to process numerous intelligence alerts because the intelligence analysis mechanism during that time was inadequate. However, it did not clearly define what it meant by adequacy or inadequacy at an analytical level. In this light, it becomes clear that the Ram Pradhan Committee left a few important questions unanswered: Is there something as adequate intelligence analysis mechanism? How much is enough? Have there been cases where the mechanism was adequate? In other words, when is an intelligence community analytically adequate? Such questions, if asked by the committee, could have led to the recognition of an importance of performance and accountability within the intelligence community. On the other hand, a root cause analysis into the failure of analysis could have prompted reforms relating to better training.

The limited exploration of the Committee almost certainly arises from the terms of reference that were extremely limited. What the intelligence community lacks is a full-fledged aftermath analysis after every major terrorist attack. The police and intelligence agencies rarely analyse — either alone or together — what they could have done better. It is not incorrect to assume that such review Committees are basically set-up to cover the repeated mistakes of the intelligence community to appraise its working and the failures of the policy makers to take any corrective action.

To make the argument that poor centralisation was the cause of 26/11 requires answering a number of questions. Take for instance the committee's main example: Suppose perfect coordination existed and if the Mumbai police had watch-listed the terrorist groups and analysed their capacity building, could they have averted 26/11?

Further, the argument that the intelligence agencies should have done more to research the capacity building of a terrorist group without being asked for also reveals a misunderstanding of the role of specific agencies within the community. The 'adequacy' theory in relation to intelligence analysis, sea patrolling, ammunition and strength of anti-terrorism squads are also slightly flawed — in terms of definitional clarity.

In developing two or more theories of failure, the committee has attributed too many causes to the failure to prevent the attack. It neither highlighted one major dilemma nor did it sufficiently explain each causal factor. A more extensive theoretical treatment would have at least addressed the underlying tension between the hypothesised causes.

However, such errors and omissions are not any new to review committees analysing counter-terrorist failures. The Kargil Review Committee, which was initiated in the aftermath of Pakistan's aggression in Kargil in 1999, made similar mistakes in establishing causal links. The Kargil and Ram Pradhan enquiry committees — which were initiated against the backdrop of a vigorous public discussion about the repeated failures of the intelligence community — provide a wealth of knowledge about the nature of theoretical underpinnings within the intelligence community and the state of intelligence reform in the country. A comparison of the two review committees not only serves the purpose mentioned above, but also offers useful insights about the problems within the intelligence community.

VII. Evaluating the Kargil Review Committee Report

The Kargil Review Committee, headed by K. Subramanyam, was appointed by the Government of India in the aftermath of the Kargil conflict in 1999 to systematically review the events leading to Pakistan aggression in Kargil district of Jammu & Kashmir, to evaluate the overall security scenario prior to the attack and to recommend measures as are considered necessary to safeguard the country against such attacks in the future. A special task force led by Girish Chandra Saxena, was constituted to analyse the lapses in intelligence operations prior to the intrusions and suggests measures to prevent occurrence of events like these in future.

The committee drew attention to several deficiencies in the intelligence system — relating to collection, reporting, collation and assessment of intelligence. The critical failures identified by the Committee related to:

1. Absence of information on the induction and de-induction of battalions and lack of accurate data on the identity of battalions,
2. Overload of background and unconfirmed information,
3. Lack of institutionalised process of interaction,
4. Flawed mechanism of intelligence gathering and
5. No system of checks and balances to assure that the intelligence consumer is getting all that he is due to get.

The G.C. Saxena Special Task Force made proposals for several organisational reforms, including the creation of Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), empowered to conduct trans-border operations, the National Technical Research Organization (NTRO), modelled after the US National Security Agency, the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC), and a state-of-the-art mechanism to facilitate intelligence sharing between the central and state agencies.

Most of the reforms advanced by the committee were implemented. However, a key component of the intelligence reform programme — the Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI) — which was proposed “to liaise with the Special Branch of the state police and the officials of the Criminal Investigation Department, offering real-time information on terrorist groups” was not fully implemented before the 26/11 attacks.

The hypothesised failures indicate a clear understanding of the problems faced by the intelligence community; however, most of the subsequent reforms are somewhat isolated and fail to tackle the problems listed above in a holistic manner. As rightly pointed out by B. Raman, the Committee shows clarity in pointing out the deficiencies in the intelligence system. However, it ‘suggested further enquiries’ by the Government of India into such deficiencies ‘as a prelude to corrective action’. Subsequent intelligence reforms listed above were suggested; however, no effort was made by the Group of Ministers (GoM) report to explain the relevance or significance of each of those reforms in addressing the deficiencies originally pointed out. It is because of this reason that the organisational reforms are questionable.

It will be incorrect to say that the DIA, NTRO or MAC has made no change in the functioning of intelligence agencies in the country. Yet, a majority of the problems highlighted by the Kargil Review Committee remain even after the implementation of reforms published in

the GoM report, as I have highlighted in the evaluation of the Ram Pradhan Committee report made above.

VIII. Lack of Adequate Intelligence

The Kargil Review Committee made the assumption that the critical failure in intelligence was related to the absence of information on the induction and de-induction of battalions and the lack of accurate data on the identity of battalions in the area opposite Kargil during 1998. It indicated that the intelligence structure and the state of intelligence gathering were inadequate to assess available intelligence, manage the overload of unconfirmed background information or gather sufficient tactical intelligence to suitably warn the system. This, according to the committee, made it impossible for the intelligence agencies to make an assessment of the threat.

Further, the committee indicated that there were ‘no specific indicators of a likely major attack in the Kargil sector, such as significant improvements in logistics and communication or a substantial force build-up or forward deployment of forces reported by any of the agencies’. While the committee continuously pinpointed the agencies for improper judgment and analysis, it barely recognised that the surprise attack arose predominantly from the enemy’s capacity of deception rather than the intelligence analyst’s failure of perception.

This improper correlation between lack of adequate intelligence and the failure to prevent the intrusion is probably misplaced, because it is definitely “unreasonable to expect all intelligence to be complete”.⁸⁷

IX. Absence of Checks and Balances

The committee report rightly observed that the lack of (a) intelligence oversight and (b) a system of regular, periodic and comprehensive intelligence briefings were the predominant causes for the failure to avert the Pakistani intrusion in Kargil. Yet, no intelligence reform was implemented to put in place a system of checks and balances.

X. Coordination, Interaction and Dialogue

The committee report noted that ‘the Indian Army did not share information about the intensity and its effect of its past firing with other agencies’ in 1998. R&AW’s inability to assess the significance of the enemy activities ‘in terms of ammunition storage or construction of underground bunkers’, were linked to the absence of this piece of information. The case was also identified as ‘another example of lack of inter-agency coordination as lack of coordination between the Army and the agencies’. The Multi Agency Centre (MAC), which failed during 26/11, was set-up in the aftermath of Kargil to ensure better sharing and coordination. Yet, problems relating to coordination, interaction and dialogue persist.

The Committee report noted that there is ‘no institutionalised process whereby R&AW, IB, BSF and army intelligence officials interact periodically at levels below the JIC’. Yet, fourteen years later, there is still a lack of protocol for engagement and interaction.

Furthermore, the Committee did not acknowledge it as a case of R&AW’s over-dependence on army inputs to make judgments about enemy action.

XI. State of Intelligence Review Committees and Reform Making

Both the Kargil Review Committee set-up after the Kargil conflict in 1999 and the Ram Pradhan Committee set-up in the aftermath of 26/11 attacks have their own share of problems. While the Kargil Committee reflected a clear understanding of the causes for such a failure, the reforms suggested by the Group of Ministers (GoM) did not clearly explain the practicability of

⁸⁷ Interview with Sood

these measures. Moreover, as the report created by the Girish Chandra Saxena Committee that was set-up by the GoM remains classified, it is inappropriate to say they were poorly developed.

As former intelligence personnel and strategic affairs expert B. Raman noted in his paper entitled *Dimensions of Intelligence Operations*, the Kargil Review Committee drew attention to serious deficiencies at various levels in intelligence process. He also noted that the committee did not go to “the reasons for these deficiencies”. Without making such an inquiry into the causal factors hypothesised in the report, “it had suggested further enquiries by the Government into these, as a prelude to corrective action”. It suggested a few corrective measures, including the creation of a Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and a separate agency for the collection of Technical Intelligence (TECHINT), patterned after the USA’s National Security Agency (NSA). However, a more elaborate theoretical treatment to a few causal factors identified in the report would have led to more sensible reforms addressing problems relating to intelligence analysis.

Both the committees have been influential in sparking debates relating to huge organisational changes in the intelligence community. Many of their recommendations were implemented. Yet, intelligence failures continue to happen, and for the same causes that were identified by the Kargil Review Committee. This exposes at least three problems in intelligence reviews: (1) a lack of understanding of what constitutes intelligence and intelligence failure, (2) the ambiguity in defining certain key terminology and (3) lack of sufficient analytical clarity in evaluating intelligence failures.

The theoretical framework created in the chapter below argues that a method to avert intelligence failures is the establishment of a clearer understanding of the expectations of the intelligence machinery and a sound conceptualisation of what constitutes an intelligence failure and who needs to be held accountable for the different failures of the intelligence community.

Chapter 6

A Theoretical Framework for Explaining Repeated Failures of the Intelligence Community

Popular literature analysing intelligence failures in the West have little scholarly work explaining how intelligence failures should be assessed. Without such a theory to explain why secret intelligence agencies fail, what intelligence failures are, and how they are starkly different from other failures of the community, it becomes difficult for intelligence review committees and/or politicians to understand the problems of the intelligence community and make appropriate proposals for reform making. In this chapter, the paper presents a theoretical framework, which might be helpful in advancing a theory at a future date.

I. Need for a Theory for Analysing Intelligence Failures

Is a counter-terrorist failure an unavoidable 'bolt from the blue' or the result of numerous failures of the intelligence community that are avoidable? Is it an inevitable disaster or a major blunder of warning? When can one call a counter-terrorist failure an intelligence failure? Often, intelligence review committees and politicians assume counter-terrorism policy making is influenced by intelligence analysis and come up with a long list of causal factors for what they tend to call 'intelligence failures'. Reform makers do not mark out the specific effect of each factor, and therefore, are unclear about which variables have more causal weight over the others.

Such an approach leads to long lists of proposals for reforms, which are rarely operationalised in full. Adding causal weight is especially significant since some causal factors can be remedied while several others can barely be overcome. The question of which factors causing intelligence failures are more vital ones in making intelligence reforms can provide useful answers to help make functional reforms, and as a result, prevent terror attacks arising from a failure of the producers or consumers of intelligence.

The literature review on the state of intelligence theorising in the West has clearly documented the sharp differences among the various theoretical traditions of intelligence studies. While a majority of the Western theoretical discourses have focussed on intelligence failures, each of them has approached intelligence failures differently and has consequently provided direction for intelligence reforms in relation to the hypothesised causes. Yet, no theory can be all encompassing and address all failures of the intelligence community.

A majority of the causal factors identified in several Western theories advanced earlier are extremely useful in explaining intelligence failures, no matter where they happen. However, none — to my best knowledge — have dealt with the failure of intelligence review committees in advancing narrow theoretical treatments in explaining failures. Western scholars have formulated theories about what causes intelligence failures and also explain how to destroy these causes.

However, the root cause of the various failures of the intelligence community in India predominantly exists in the failure to sufficiently understand such causes. It is essential to create a theory to: (a) help intelligence review committees analyse intelligence failures with more clarity and rigour, (b) facilitate them — inquiry committees and policy makers — in determining which failures of the intelligence community are more urgent and (c) systematise the intelligence reform making process.

The starting point in addressing the above failure, and subsequently, determining the weight of a certain causal factor in explaining an intelligence failure is a system for cataloguing

the various failures of the intelligence community. An apparently simple, yet systematic questioning of the various failures — identified as causal factors for an intelligence failure — can be extremely helpful in this process.

In an attempt to build a theory of intelligence failure, it is essential to understand the nature of counter-terrorist failures. Traditionally, scholars note that there could be three types of intelligence failures: those pertaining to the collection of information, to its analysis, and to the response to the produced intelligence.⁸⁸ “While failures to collect adequate intelligence may be attributed to the agencies, failure to respond or analyse the intelligence made available to policy makers are considered failures of political-strategic leadership.”⁸⁹

Yet, calling all three failures an intelligence failure could be misleading and can often make the wrong stakeholders accountable. Therefore, I call for a different approach through this policy paper. I believe it is important to clearly make a distinction between the failure of the intelligence community to produce accurate strategic or tactical intelligence (intelligence failure), failure of policy makers to respond or process available intelligence (policy failure), failure of intelligence officials to adapt to the changing faces of transnational terrorism (adaptation failure) and failure to make sensible intelligence reforms to avert such failures (reform failure). Such an approach, I argue, is necessary because it makes it easier to hold someone accountable, be it intelligence agencies, policy makers or reform makers.

Any significant theoretical treatise in intelligence studies has to be either explanatory or problem solving. “The ability to explain is more important than the ability to predict,” as IR scholar Kenneth Waltz points out as function of theory. Before getting to explaining what intelligence failures really are, we need some clarity in definition, especially as the term “intelligence” means different things to different people.

Key Terminology

For the purpose of this research paper, intelligence is conceptualised as a distinct activity aimed at increasing the understanding or influence of an opponent. The usage is adapted from Michael Warner who defines it as a “secret, state activity to understand or influence domestic or foreign entities”,⁹⁰ and Thomas Troy who calls it “knowledge of the enemy”.⁹¹

While the ‘secrecy’ element of national security intelligence is often emphasised elsewhere, this paper looks at the several other perceived definitions from major discourse producers, including the intelligence producers and the consumers, i.e. policy makers, military, and several others. “To the intelligence community, it is perceived as a kind of information that helps to inform, instruct, and educate the policy world. However, it conjures different meanings for the policy makers. It might be considered a political asset or liability, depending on whether the information helps or hinders the fulfilment of political goals.”⁹²

Moreover, this paper also keeps in mind that intelligence is viewed differently across the globe. For instance, intelligence is differently conceptualised in countries like the US, the UK or Israel, which are ‘security states’. In India, intelligence is still considered an activity to protect the security of the government, and this is evident from the proportion of counter-terrorism related

⁸⁸ Srinath Raghavan, 'Intelligence failures and reforms,' available at http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/599/599_srinath_raghavan.htm, accessed on July 01, 2013

⁸⁹ This typology draws on Richard K. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in American National Security*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007.

⁹⁰ Michael Warner, 'Introduction: Wanted: A definition of intelligence' in 'Secret Intelligence – A Reader' (eds.) Christopher Andrew Richard J. Aldrich, Wesley K. Wark (Routledge, 2009), p1

⁹¹ Troy, Thomas, 'The “correct” definition of intelligence,' *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol V/4, (1992), p.433, 443, 449

⁹² Michael Warner, 'Introduction: Wanted: A definition of intelligence' in 'Secret Intelligence – A Reader' (eds.) Christopher Andrew Richard J. Aldrich, Wesley K. Wark (Routledge, 2009), p3

intelligence personnel to the rest of them at the Intelligence Bureau. This is where we lack as a society in our understanding about what the intelligence function constitutes.⁹³

Strategic vs. Tactical Intelligence

Basically, there are two different kinds of intelligence — strategic i.e. long-term intelligence of the threat that an opponent poses to national security & tactical i.e. highly perishable, short-term intelligence. Strategic intelligence is required to alert policy makers to any changes in the nature and trajectory of a terrorist threat, thus helping them formulate timely policy responses. In addition, it also provides a focus for tactical efforts. On the other hand, the primary purpose of tactical intelligence is to identify ground-level information on terrorist outfits, predominantly for the consumption of local police forces.

II. What is an Intelligence Failure?

“They’re not all intelligence failures. There is a failure to act, or a failure to appreciate intelligence. Or, there could be cases where the consumers — policy makers and law enforcement agencies — suffer from an inability or lack of capacity to act.”

- Vikram Sood, former director, R&AW.

Universally, it is accepted that intelligence failures arise only when analytic judgments of intelligence analysts turn out to be imprecise in a big way or when a major surprise occurs because of inadequate or imprecise intelligence warning. In other words, the production of accurate intelligence is understood as an important part of the process of preventing militancy or terrorist attacks. However, as collecting information relating to terrorist operation is an awfully complicated task, several stakeholders from the intelligence business strongly feel the community of intelligence agencies cannot be solely blamed for all terrorist attacks in the country. Obviously, this calls for a different approach of categorising such a failure.

As American intelligence scholar Stephen Marrin explains in his article entitled *Preventing intelligence failures by learning from the past*, “Intelligence failure can lead to surprise when information is not collected or integrated effectively, and policy failure can lead to surprise if actions were not taken despite intelligence warnings. Nonetheless, exploring the role intelligence plays in preventing surprises can shed light on the ways that changes in intelligence process could prevent future surprises.”⁹⁴

Since the 9/11 Committee Report was made public, there has been a widespread tendency to equate intelligence failures to a ‘failure to share information’. However, according to American non-conservative scholars Abram Shulsky and Gary Schmitt, intelligence failure is essentially “a misunderstanding of the situation that leads a government to take actions that are inappropriate and counterproductive to its own national interests”.

While the subject of ‘intelligence failure’ by itself can be very contentious, there needs to be greater caution in deducing whether a failure to prevent an attack is an intelligence failure. Therefore, in this paper, I insist that a few pertinent questions should be asked in order to determine — with certainty — that it is an intelligence failure.

To resolve a failure as one of inaccurate intelligence production, I suggest three questions should be asked and answered:⁹⁵ (1) Did the policy community have any strategic, tactical or generic intelligence about the likelihood of an attack? If so, what? (2) Was there any pre-attack intelligence alerts — direct or indirect — from the central, state or any international intelligence agencies? (3) To what extent is the intelligence community equipped to detect or pre-empt

⁹³Sood says this is also why scholars have been reluctant to be associated with intelligence activity in the country.

⁹⁴ Stephen Marrin, ‘Preventing Intelligence failures by learning from the past’, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 17:655-672

⁹⁵ The questions were drafted based on several interactions with former intelligence personnel.

attacks? Besides these questions, it is also essential to understand the knowledge gap between policy makers and intelligence officials about a perceived threat.⁹⁶

In addition to the above, former director of R&AW Vikram Sood suggests asking two more questions to understand the quality of intelligence produced:

Is the production of intelligence good per-se?

If the intelligence input is poor, why is it so?

Only if the intelligence produced is considered poor or inadequate to avert a surprise attack can it be confirmed as an 'intelligence failure', he says.

Only if there is sufficient evidence to suggest that there was no intelligence available prior to the attack can it be categorised as an intelligence failure. As former intelligence personnel K.V. Thomas agreed: "Only a dearth of intelligence should be associated with failure of the intelligence community."

Contrary to the traditional approach of categorising intelligence failures based on how much intelligence there was available, this approach would accommodate scenarios where there is limited intelligence within the failure of policy makers to act on general or strategic intelligence. However, specific answers to each of these questions can help make a thorough post-event analysis from which intelligence agencies can benefit.⁹⁷

III. When do Intelligence Agencies Fail to Adapt?

Failures of intelligence can also be associated with a failure of the intelligence community to adapt itself based on the changing needs of the community. 'Adaptation failure', as intelligence scholar Amy Zegart puts it, is the intelligence community's failure to adapt itself based on the changing needs of the community. According to her, three factors tend to explain such adaptation failures. They are: "The nature of bureaucratic organisations, the self interest of presidents, legislators and governmentand the fragmented structure of the federal government."⁹⁸

What exactly does it mean to say that an organisation adapts or fails to adapt? For the purpose of this paper, the term 'adaptation' will mean a failure of the intelligence community to adjust to the changing faces of terrorism by implementing ingenious organisational reforms. In simple terms, it is a failure of intelligence policy makers to implement the organisational reforms or other intelligence reforms they originally thought were crucial in averting terrorist attacks in future.

Determining whether a counter-terrorist failure is a failure of the intelligence community to adapt necessitates answering a different set of questions: (1) Did intelligence officials and policy makers recognise the gravity of the threat posed by terrorist outfits such as the Indian Mujahedeen or the LeT before the attacks? (2) Did they understand the connection between terrorist threat and the imperative for organisational change? (3) And to what extent did they achieve the organisational changes they believed were necessary?⁹⁹

Answering such questions will not only help familiarise ourselves with the nature of reforms made to strengthen the intelligence apparatus prior to a terrorist attack, but also be of assistance in finding out which of these reforms were implemented and how a few political leaders validate the reforms they make.

IV. How do we Recognise a Policy Failure?

⁹⁶ Interviews with several past and serving intelligence personnel

⁹⁷ This kind of approach is recommended because as strategic affairs expert, Mr. Manoj Joshi, says, 'Any attack indicates a failure. Is it a failure to act on actionable information or a failure of no intelligence at all? The nature of intelligence alert becomes crucial in determining the kind of failure to avert a terrorist attack.'

⁹⁸ See Amy Zegart, 'September 11 and the Adaptation Failure of U.S. Intelligence Agencies,' *International Security* 29, no. 4 (Spring 2005): 78-111.

⁹⁹ The method is derived from Amy Zegart (Spring 2005)

‘An intelligence agency is as good as its consumer. If the consumer is not going to consume the intelligence, it’s pointless.’

- Vikram Sood, former director, R&AW.

Even the best intelligence product can go waste if the policy maker fails to act on it at the appropriate time. Regardless of how well the intelligence community predicts flawlessly, intelligence failures can happen — either due to policy makers’ neglect or due to unreasonable expectations about the function of intelligence. The conscientiousness of the intelligence agencies ends where intelligence is produced and disseminated. It’s up to the policy makers — the consumers of intelligence — to either avert an attack or let a surprise happen, despite intelligence.

According to the Girish Chandra Saxena committee, which was set up after the Kargil conflict, if intelligence agencies are not given long-term and strategic priorities, then it may be attributed as a policy failure. However, for the purpose of this paper, failures of a policy maker to act on strategic or tactical intelligence produced by central intelligence agencies are called policy failures. As former JIC director S.D. Pradhan points out in an article entitled *Indian intelligence system needs urgent reforms*, published in Times of India, “Failure to provide timely warning is considered a failure by the policy makers and other consumers.”

To find out whether we are left with a case of policy failure, the best way is to analyse the influence of the intelligence community on decision makers.¹⁰⁰ This could be done by evaluating whether a certain intelligence warning would have made a difference in preventing an attack from happening. For this purpose, it is vital to recognise (1) the extent to which intelligence warnings are taken seriously, (2) whether government leaders understand the gravity of the threat alerts, and (3) whether they take any policy action to avert the threat.

If the intelligence community provided intelligence analysis that would have sufficiently warned the consumer of intelligence — in this case the policy maker — and if such intelligence has not been acted upon, it is appropriate to call it a policy failure. In India, the central government often passes the buck to the state governments for not acting on available intelligence. The intelligence community is often blamed for improper coordination. However, the question of whether the intelligence was ‘actionable’ and sufficient is often missed in the debate.

However, it is not always the fault of the politician. In case of the 26/11 attack, Ranade pointed out that there was a counter-terrorist failure because “the system of crisis management did not function to its fullest extent, and the person at the helm of affairs believed that he knew better. He thought the 26/11 attack — before it happened — was not a terror attack; but simply gang violence”.

V. When do we Face a Reform Failure?

While all the above failures are more explicit, a reform failure is one, I think, that is the most hidden failure among them all. Indian intelligence review committees set up by the government after major attacks, often do not make an exhaustive assessment of the problems of the intelligence community when a surprise attack happens. They tend to find too many reasons for a counter-terrorist failure and as a consequence make proposals for several reforms. In India, there is a general tendency to believe that all hypothesised causes can be corrected by ‘meta-institutional’ reforms. Reform makers are also prone to make several reforms to destroy the many causes identified initially. However, their failure to understand where the problem lies or who is accountable for a particular failure leads to ambiguous, if not totally irrelevant, reforms.

¹⁰⁰ In this policy paper, I insist on taking a very balanced approach in categorising failures and holding particular stakeholders accountable. While some (unnamed) intelligence officials are against the terminology of ‘intelligence failure,’ greater circumspection should be employed to the term ‘policy failure’ too.

To establish whether a counter-terrorist failure is a reform failure, one has to undertake the kind of inquiry advanced in this paper so far. This involves making (a) a review of the state of intelligence theorisation in the country that faces the failure, (b) analyse certain perceptions of intelligence failures among political leaders, and (c) assess the state of intelligence review committees in the country. Such an inquiry will show whether the failure is a result of past reform failures, i.e., a failure to make appropriate reforms that prevent several other failures listed above.

Intelligence review committees assessing the performance of intelligence agencies and policy makers in the aftermath of a counter-terrorist failure should preferably ask all the four sets of questions and gather evidence from central and state intelligence agencies, policy makers and the policing community. Such an approach to analysing the causes for counter-terrorist failures will definitely offer different solutions — if not the most appropriate ones. Though getting the concepts right is fundamental to good reform making, the ability to make suitable reforms vests with the reformer's imaginative way of thinking.

The theoretical foundations advanced above are extremely rudimentary. While it focuses on a very broad picture, it fails to get to the details of any particular failure. Take for instance, an intelligence failure, which arises from a failure to produce intelligence, could be dealt in a different way. Failures to produce appropriate and accurate intelligence estimates may arise from factors such as (a) an intelligence analyst's inability to make assessments, (b) inadequate intelligence machinery in a country or (c) lack of professionalism in the community. Such an approach to intelligence failures might result in a theory of intelligence gathering and analysis.

Chapter 7

Re-interpreting the Failure to Prevent 26/11

“The approach of calling the 26/11 attacks an intelligence failure is not appropriate.”

- D.Sivanandan, former Mumbai police commissioner

As noted in several chapters above, the failure to prevent the 26/11 attack is not a failure of intelligence production. There is sufficient evidence to believe that there were numerous pieces of intelligence available for policy makers to act upon. The 26/11 attack was undoubtedly a failure of policy makers to act on available pieces of specific intelligence. Yet, the intelligence community's failure to adapt, i.e. implement past intelligence reforms, and the reform maker's failure to advance the appropriate reforms before the attack were more evident. However, in this concluding chapter of this policy paper, I will show how thinking differently about intelligence failures and having more definitional clarity can help in making a sound assessment of a counter-terrorist failure.

In this chapter, I will first justify why the counter-terrorist failure of 26/11 is not an intelligence failure. Second, I will analyse whether the 26/11 terrorist attacks was the result of intelligence failure or policy failure. A closer look at the pre-26/11 intelligence architecture and estimates will help distinguish between the two. Third, I will question if the 26/11 attacks happened because of the failure of the intelligence community to adapt to the changing needs of new terrorist threats. Finally, I will argue for calling the failure to prevent 26/11 a reform failure, and answer a few lingering questions such as: Why has the 26/11 stimulated intense levels of internal security reforms whereas previous — and more deadly attacks — have not? Why were the standards of intelligence collection, analysis and sharing not adequate prior to 26/11? What changes have been made to the intelligence apparatus in the post 26/11 era, and how are they adequate? What areas of improvement can be made in order to make the intelligence process more adequate to combat terrorist attacks of this kind?

I. Why 26/11 Was Not An Intelligence Failure

During 26/11, scattered pieces of intelligence were circulated relating to possibilities of sea-borne attack, multiple attacks, commando operation and *fidayeen* plans. Not all pre-attack estimates were taken seriously. The law enforcement and security agencies took a few precautionary measures. However, as the intelligence agencies did not get the dates right, a few security structures — like the detection doors — were dismantled two days before the attack took place. It is probably not right to argue that the attacks might have not taken place if the security structures were still in place. However, this only clarifies that there was sufficient intelligence to create such structures in the first place.

On the other hand, “Central agencies received a series of intelligence alerts from 2006 that LeT was training teams for sea-borne attacks on multiple targets, including several luxury hotels.”¹⁰¹ Yet, because of several ‘capacity issues’, the government of Maharashtra could not strengthen the coastal security.

II. Is 26/11 a Case of Policy Failure?

The case of 26/11 is clearly a failure to act on intelligence that was available, rather than an intelligence failure. While some inputs were put to use and security measures were made stronger, some other vital pieces of information were ignored. Yet, it was not the failure of the politician alone, says Ranade answering to a question on 26/11. “The system of crisis

¹⁰¹ Interview with V. Balachandran, Mumbai

management did not function to its fullest extent, because the person at the helm of affairs believed that he knew better. He thought the 26/11 attack — before it happened — was not a terror attack but simply gang violence. What a terrible mistake!”¹⁰²

The argument relating to ‘policy failure’ is also mistaken because the government leaders in power did not realise the ‘gravity of the terrorist threat’.¹⁰³ Further, as the terrorist methodology used in 26/11 was extremely innovative, it is not accurate to hold the policy maker accountable for the failure.

III. Why 26/11 was a Failure of the Intelligence Machinery

A co-author of the Ram Pradhan Committee report, V. Balachandran highlighted in his paper entitled *Dealing with the aftermath of attacks: Lessons from Mumbai and elsewhere on what to do and what not to do*, that the Maharashtra state government failed to strengthen coastal security and neglected open-source intelligence. More than a failure of the ‘government machinery’, the 26/11 attacks were a failure of intelligence machinery. The Multi Agency Centre (MAC), which was set up after the Kargil conflict in 1999, failed to work.

Answering a question about communication and sharing failures within the intelligence community during 26/11, Ranade noted that a crucial piece of intelligence, which was shared by R&AW — about a ship moving down the coastline — was shared through MAC.

“Unfortunately, the system failed to recognise the importance of the alert.” R&AW subsequently passed it through the MAC; but the Coast Guard or Navy did not act upon the intelligence input. It is not correct to say that the attack could have been averted with this one piece of intelligence. However, this was clearly a failure, and that of adaptation, as the MAC, which set-up after Kargil Review Committee, was not fully operationalised before the 26/11 happened.

IV. Why 26/11 is Not Just a ‘Failure to Connect the Dots’

As Roberta Wohlstetter once explained in her classic 1962 study, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, “It is much easier after the event to sort the relevant signals from the irrelevant signals. After the event, of course, the signal is always crystal clear....but, before the event, it is obscure and pregnant with conflicting meanings.”

Most writers of intelligence failure studying the 26/11 often note that the failure arose from the intelligence community’s failure to ‘connect the dots’. However, it is extremely challenging to sift through the noise to pick relevant pieces of intelligence. While supporters of NATGRID often feel the reform will end such failures, ‘the vacuum cleaner approach is only suitable for big governments such as the US or China’,¹⁰⁴ which are technically more superior.

The greater failure, of course, is that of changing the mentality of a few intelligence personnel. There is a greater necessity to redefine the sole purpose of intelligence from ‘need to know’ to ‘need to share’. Organisational reforms such as the NCTC or NATGRID will happen only in such an environment, though political pressures still play a major role.

V. Why 26/11 is a Reform Failure

It is clear from the arguments made above that intelligence producers should not have been held responsible for such a failure. Policy makers should be criticised for the counter-terrorism failure because of three reasons: (1) they failed to act on available intelligence in a timely manner, (2) they failed to implement the past intelligence reforms in full, which the earlier governments considered imperative, and (3) they failed to sufficiently educate themselves about

¹⁰² Ranade is known to have been involved in making an in-depth analysis of the 26/11 attack in its immediate aftermath. The report remains classified, and was therefore not shared with the author.

¹⁰³ Such a deduction was made based on V. Balachandran’s comments who observed the newness in terrorist tactics — the kind that was not witnessed in India before 26/11 happened.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Ranade

new faces of terrorism. However, the blame for the failure should be partly shared by the intelligence producers themselves, for their failure to be imaginative. Nevertheless, what is clear is that 26/11 happened because of a poor intelligence apparatus, inadequate sharing mechanism, and lack of capacity, all of which could have been rectified through implementation of sensible reforms.

The very fact that the 26/11 attack stimulated intense levels of internal security reforms while previous attacks have not clearly points to a failure to recognise the need for such reforms in the past. There could be a few reasons for such failure: (1) Intelligence review committees do not do full-fledged aftermath analysis after every major attack. (2) Even if they do, they don't analyse all aspects of failure. Even in cases where they sufficiently analyse, intelligence reforms barely address the hypothesised causes. And, most such reforms tend to be meta-institutional.

Intelligence review committees — the only way of governmental assessment of a counter-terrorist failure — lack a clear understanding of what constitutes and intelligence failure and what are the other failures faced by the intelligence community. This failure of the review committees and policy makers to clearly distinguish between the problems and make specific stakeholders accountable has led to the reform failure prior to the 26/11 attacks.

“Since 26/11, greater focus has been on sharing and coordinating actions on pieces of information available and then hoping to develop more leads on it.”¹⁰⁵ One of the most important changes made to the intelligence apparatus was the strengthening of the Multi Agency Centre (MAC), which was created much earlier but had not been fully activated. The MAC brought together all the law enforcement and intelligence agencies on one table to share their pieces of information so that necessary action could be taken in consultation with the relevant agencies. State MACs (SMACs) were created to enable the local security agencies to share relevant information.

However, “MAC, like all other intelligence agencies, is under-staffed.”¹⁰⁶ Though “MAC meets every day and SMACs do not meet every day”, the efficiency of such an agency is affected because “there is no written protocol either for interaction, engagement or coordination”.¹⁰⁷

The revamped intelligence architecture in the post 26/11 era failed miserably during the Mumbai 2011 attacks. “Even today, it is not in a position to make timely and holistic assessment and assist in swift and coordinated response.”¹⁰⁸ It still lacks the teeth and unambiguous authority over Subsidiary Multi Agency Centres (SMACs) and state intelligence machinery.

The story of intelligence reform is not over.

¹⁰⁵ E-mail interaction with a source privy to such kind of information.

¹⁰⁶ Mohan Singh, 'Failure of intelligence coordination - Did we learn anything from 26/11,' *Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, January 25, 2011, accessed on September 25, 2013 at <http://www.claws.in/Failure-of-intelligence-coordination---Did-we-learn-anything-from-26/11-Centre-for-Land-Warfare-Studies.html>

¹⁰⁷ Interview with a former IB director (name withheld for protecting identity)

¹⁰⁸ Mohan Singh, 'Failure of intelligence coordination - Did we learn anything from 26/11,' *Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, January 25, 2011, accessed on September 25, 2013 at <http://www.claws.in/Failure-of-intelligence-coordination---Did-we-learn-anything-from-26/11-Centre-for-Land-Warfare-Studies.html>

Chapter 8

The Golden Mean: Striking a balance between secrecy and sharing

I

In this policy paper, I argue that repeated failures of the intelligence community are a result of a failure to implement sensible intelligence reforms. Based on the several interactions I have had with producers and consumers of intelligence, I conclude that such a failure arises because of two reasons: (1) the inability of policy makers and reform makers to understand and appreciate what constitutes intelligence and intelligence failure and (2) the lack of rigorous academic investigation of the intelligence business. The paper, therefore, makes the claim that intelligence reforms in India are not sufficiently 'sensible' because of insufficient analysis into intelligence failures — both in policy and academic circles.¹⁰⁹

Towards the end, I suggest that thinking differently about intelligence and intelligence failure can certainly help better appreciate the problems of the intelligence community, and as a result, can lead to sensible intelligence reforms. I also demonstrate how measuring the performance of intelligence reforms might be a useful way of finding where India is in the war against terrorism.

I diagnose failures in this manner and offer such a prescription as narrated above, because several intelligence reforms that have been advanced in the past have not been able to avert terrorist attacks in the future.¹¹⁰ All evidence collected in the paper suggests that the intelligence reforms made in the past have not been very sensible and have barely addressed the problems at the root. The performance of intelligence reforms, as measured in the initial chapters of this policy paper, are purely based on (1) interactions with former intelligence personnel and academicians, (2) observations made from intelligence review committee reports and (3) deductions about counter-terrorist failures purely arising from intelligence failures. However, such reasoning might not be adequate to put together a theory or doctrine to explain such failures. Even before measuring the performance of intelligence reforms, what is more crucial is to measure the contribution of intelligence to counter-terrorism. Moreover, such measurements should be more standardised.

How can we measure the value of intelligence accurately to see if it is contributing to victory in the war on terror? How can we measure the progress in intelligence reform making? When is intelligence reform complete? Only intelligence agencies and the government — who are the custodians of secretive national security information — can answer. Though statistics about intelligence successes can reveal a lot about the success of an intelligence reform, Indian intelligence agencies hardly reveal such stories. This concealment of such information makes it impossible for academicians to access seminal material about the functioning of intelligence agencies.

As a result, it gets hard to make any strong arguments about the performance of intelligence agencies, or the performance of intelligence reforms. Though measuring consumer satisfaction is a helpful way of judging the performance of intelligence, policy makers hardly

¹⁰⁹ I make the following assumptions: (1) Strengthening the intelligence apparatus can help avert failures in future. (2) Intelligence scholars can have a major influence over intelligence policy making. (3) Political perceptions about policy issues are created based on sound academic analysis.

divulge the full nature of intelligence that was made available to them, as they are wary of debates that might follow. Some journalists covering intelligence issues tend to make biased judgments about the performance of agencies by looking into hundreds of faulty or useless intelligence alerts issued by intelligence agencies.

II

In such a scenario, where intelligence agencies and policy makers fail to offer such information, identifying a method to measure the value of intelligence and the performance of intelligence reform becomes extremely complicated. Without any doubts, legal or parliamentary oversight of intelligence agencies can provide the most appropriate mechanisms for measuring the performance of intelligence. However, given the complexity of creating such oversight mechanisms in the near future, here's what I think the producers and consumers of intelligence should consider doing to help intelligence scholars come up with solutions to avert the failures of the intelligence community in future.

1. As a starting point, intelligence agencies should reveal — at least to a small group of “reliable¹¹¹ intelligence scholars” — information about the nature of intelligence that was shared via the Multi Agency Centre (MAC) prior to a terrorist attack. This could be particularly useful to assess a failure and identify who should be held accountable. Such a disclosure of information can also help scholars arrive at a trend chart about the kind the intelligence that has been produced and shared.¹¹²
2. Though the intelligence community confirms the effective functioning of the MAC, politicians constantly correlate failures of intelligence to failures of coordination. To put an end to such wrong allegations made by a handful of politicians, there has to be a mechanism where MAC should be held accountable to intelligence agencies if they fail to pass any pertinent piece of intelligence. Of course, it might be helpful to agencies if MAC returns the alerts it discards during its evaluation.
3. Useful statistics about the functioning of the MAC can help intelligence scholars rule out the likelihood of failures arising from intelligence sharing and coordination. After all, evaluating how well intelligence flows is an excellent metric to assess the performance of intelligence agencies.
4. Though intelligence agencies often tend to interact among themselves despite the invisible ‘turf war’ among themselves, sharing information about the source of an intelligence input can avoid duplications. This could particularly prove useful if the intelligence agencies are more concerned about the quality and precision of intelligence they produce. If such a quality-control mechanism was put in place, and if it was also made public, that can be a useful way of measuring intelligence accuracy.
5. The country's premier intelligence agencies — the IB and the R&AW — should reduce their levels of secrecy at least in divulging successful operations, like the recent story about the arrest of Bhatkal brothers. For instance, this particular story is an excellent case

¹¹¹ By ‘reliable scholars’, I refer to the ones who are capable of dispassionately studying policy issues and making arguments based on ‘facts rather than opinion’. In other words, intelligence agencies should consider sharing such limited information as listed above, with a set of objective and ethical researchers who also preserve the rights of those being researched.

¹¹² I could not develop such a trend chart for this paper, because of the unavailability of such kind of information.

of successful coordination between Indian and Nepalese agencies, and between R&AW, the IB and the NIA.

III

Reducing the level of secrecy of intelligence agencies in sharing such information alone will not put an end to this problem. In order to help scholars identify a trend in intelligence failures or successes, policy makers or other consumers of intelligence, including the military or the navy, should be open to sharing some information about what they know. Here's the kind of information I think scholars would benefit from if shared by the consumers of intelligence. Such sharing can put an end to the 'buck-passing' that happens in the aftermath of every major counter-terrorist failure in the country.

1. The consumers of intelligence should regularly share information about the nature of intelligence that was made available prior to an attack. Such frankness will be appreciated as it will help scholars develop databases and also make agencies more accountable.
2. Even if they are wary of sharing such information, creating feedback mechanisms in public will be of some help. Though this could reveal huge misunderstandings about the producers and consumers of intelligence, it could be a useful way through which a handful of intelligence scholars can understand the intricacies of the producer-consumer divide.
3. On the contrary, if they are worried about making such feedback mechanisms public, they might want to share useful statistics about the successes of intelligence agencies as a useful way of boosting their morale. Scholars could also benefit from such statistics.
4. Another useful way is to establish a clear mandate for intelligence agencies in public and provide occasional metrics about how they perform.

Chapter 9

Direction for Future Intelligence Reforms

Several monographs relating to intelligence reforms have made the following recommendations:

1. A sound system of checks and balances is an absolute necessity in averting repeated intelligence failures. The intelligence agencies, Parliament, legislature and external review bodies should play independent roles in overseeing the workings of the intelligence community.¹¹³
2. As old-fashioned traditional military threats are overshadowed by new asymmetric threats, there is a need for reprioritisation of national security objectives and for redefining the intelligence priorities of the country.¹¹⁴
3. As key intelligence experts in the US note, “Speed and agility is the key to war on terrorism, not more levels of bureaucracy.”
4. There is a growing realisation that the obsession with secrecy has prevented agencies from interacting with experts in the outside world where a good deal of knowledge and expertise exists. Advances in technology and information revolution calls for a multidisciplinary approach to data analysis.

An IDSA Task Force report on intelligence reforms noted that “there is a broad consensus shared by a wide section of Indian intelligence professionals and academicians about the need to enable better coordination amongst various agencies”.

Yet, the evidence I have gathered through frank discussions with several former intelligence personnel calls for a different direction towards intelligence reforms.

Summary of recommendations

The absence of an independent body to monitor the performance of intelligence agencies, the lack of reasonable expectations from the intelligence community, coupled with a recruitment bias has hampered professionalism within intelligence agencies. This will be clearly addressed in the recommendations advanced below:

I. Towards building a theory to explain failures

Intelligence review committees in the country often take the wrong turn because the subject of intelligence failure is overloaded with questionable assumptions.

1. There is a need for more theorising in the field to reduce the lack of definitional clarity, and to enable a better understanding of the problems faced by the intelligence community.
2. There’s a need to develop a professional literature of intelligence studies which will contribute to the growth of a systematic body of knowledge about intelligence processes in the country.

II. Recruitment, training & recognition

¹¹³ Locating India’s intelligence agencies – in a democratic framework

¹¹⁴ ORF workshop on intelligence failures

1. The bureaucratic nature of intelligence agencies should not hamper recruitment and training. What agencies urgently require is a more open recruitment policy and a rigorous procedure of hiring the most flexible minds in the country.
2. Agencies should set high standards for recruiting and insist on special language or other interpretation skills from prospective candidates.

III. Capacity building & skill management

1. Out of the total intelligence personnel within IB, only a few hundreds of them have been specifically hired to gather and analyse intelligence relating to counter-terrorism. Therefore, both the manpower quality and quantity should be improved to effectively avert failures of intelligence.
2. Though a need for professionalising the intelligence agencies has been highlighted in the past, no reform has been proposed to allow lateral entry and/or promote the use of interpersonal skills in gathering intelligence. For example, a banker will have a better grip on issues relating to money laundering than a normal intelligence analyst who is recruited without knowledge about the subject.
3. There is a need to relax the secretive nature of intelligence agencies and outsource experts from varied backgrounds to allow for creative analysis.

IV. Intelligence analysis

1. Reforms relating to improving training for intelligence analysts should aim at reducing the time taken to whet an individual. Such reforms should also allow for inter-agency training, which can provide an insight into how their counterparts in other agencies work.
2. The real challenge is to recruit and train intelligence analysts who are encouraged to think creatively. Scenario building and conflict simulations can certainly address the lack of imaginative intelligence reasoning of a handful of intelligence analysts and also provide a direction for future intelligence gathering.
3. Former intelligence personnel can be particularly helpful in building real-time scenarios and making conflict simulations.

V. Coordination and cohesion in working

1. Organisational reforms such as MAC can effectively function only if the community creates a clear communication protocol and establish a set of rules for engaging and de-engaging. NCTC or NATGRID are also likely to benefit from it when implemented.
2. What's more urgent is a change in the attitude of a few intelligence personnel and the need to change the culture of spy circles from 'need to know' to 'need to share'.

VI. Need for post-event audits

1. Creating mechanisms for intelligence oversight might not happen overnight. However, there is a need to do in-depth aftermath analysis within intelligence agencies. This will not only help them identify where they've gone wrong, but also provide direction for future intelligence operations.

VII. Intelligence reforms

1. Sweeping organisational reforms such as NCTC or NATGRID are not the only ways to make intelligence agencies work together. The cultural barriers that stop agencies from adequately sharing intelligence can be corrected using less severe measures.
2. The first step towards changing such a culture is standardising the rules for protecting information and relaxing certain ethical constraints relating to 'operational loyalty.'
3. Reforms should not only focus on creating newer capabilities, it should lay more importance on what obstacles are stopping existing capabilities from being efficient. Real reforms should try to change organisational culture instead of altering organisational charts.

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