

General

A Seminar was hosted by CLAWS at the Seminar Hall of CLAWS on 21 February 2012 titled 'Perception Management of Indian Army'. The seminar was chaired by Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch, SM, VSM(Retired), Additional Director, CLAWS. The Seminar was attended by a large number of veterans, serving officers, media persons, members of the strategic community and others. The speakers and the subjects covered were as under:

Army's Self Image: Maj Gen SL Narasimhan, AVSM, VSM, *ADG PI*

Perception Management and Role of Media: Mr Nitin Gokhale, *NDTV*

People's Perception of Indian Army: Mr Iftikhar Gilani, *Journalist*

Ground Realities: BGS (IW) of Northern, Central and Eastern Commands)

Closing Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd), Additional Director, CLAWS

Opening Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch, SM, VSM(Retd), Additional Director, CLAWS

Perception Management is akin to advertising. Like in advertising, we need to get a specific message across to the target audience. But while getting the message across, we need to remember that the quality of the message can in no way be better than the product. If people's expectations of the Army through an effective Perception Management campaign is well beyond what can be achieved by the Force, the impact will be negative. This merely underlines the obvious. The actions of the Army must be in sync with the Perception Management campaign.

In any Perception Management campaign, truth must always be maintained. Resorting to falsehood may give an immediate short term gains but will have a negative impact in the long run. Also, Perception Management is not the proverbial silver bullet which will win the battle; that bullet still remains the officers and men of the Indian Army. But Perception Management is an enabler to shape the environment in a manner that can facilitate successful task accomplishment.

Self Image of Army: Maj Gen SL Narsimhan, AVSM, VSM (Additional Director General of Public Information)

The topic of the today's seminar is on an extremely important subject which is talked about more but understood and practiced far less. What are the factors affecting the army's image? There are two major players: the Army and the media. The media feels that army is very slow to react to a situation and provide information. The delay is understandable in the Army context as it follows a hierarchical system and operates in

vertical silos which slow down passing of the information to a major extent. There is also the issue of 'media shyness'. Right from the initial years of service, the military man is told to stay away from the media which creates an inherent shyness to open up when called for. Retired personnel have been active in the media but they have their own views which may not necessarily be the views the Army would like to project. Another issue is 'informal revelations'. This is not an approved interaction with the media. Also, Army personnel revealing information in this manner may not be aware of macro level issues and the full picture which may then be detrimental to Service interests. The media, by its very nature, delves on negative news. It is negative news which makes headlines and not the good work done by the Army. The main article is generally balanced but the title tilts the perception. The blame for the title is put on the editorial team and the journalist absolves himself of any responsibility. Reporters at times lack an understanding about the Indian Army and the way it functions. This leads to a mismatch in the way the reporter writes and the way things actually happen on ground. Sometimes there is biased and motivated reporting specially in procurement cases instigated by rival firms which leads to delays in procurement. Such issues affect the army's image and the good work being done by the rest of the army tends to be downplayed. A few negative reports do not represent the entire Indian Army but they project the Indian Army in a bad light.

A good image of the Army is in the interest of the country. There is lot of negative reporting on certain issues like the misunderstanding between the Army and the MoD, procurement delays, slow pace of Army modernisation etc. This only benefits our adversaries. So the media should exercise restraint while writing on sensitive issues. As part of perception management, what needs to be conveyed is that the Indian Army is professionally competent, dependable, honourable, apolitical and transparent in its functioning. This is no more than the truth. The audience for perception management is our country's people and the youth, the armed forces fraternity, the decision making authorities, the CI/CT areas, the foreign countries/organizations and the media. The majority of civilian people and the youth have a high regard for the Army. The Army comes across to the people as an organisation which defends the country and is the last bastion against all manners of threats. However, there is a very slight dip in the popularity rating of the army as compared to the previous years, which needs to be looked into.

The armed forces fraternity can be divided into officers, junior commissioned officers and the other ranks. The officers can be further sub divided into seniors, juniors and retired. The understanding and perception of each one varies. The projection of army to each of these categories has to be accordingly planned. The majority of junior commissioned officers and the other ranks read and understand Hindi; hence army needs to interact with this group through that medium. In the forward posts and the field

areas, the access to print media is very limited. So Army needs to interact with them through the relevant medium. The retired officers have enough experience; they just need to be updated on current issues. The measures required to be undertaken for all these issues need to be identified.

In the Army, the supremacy of the civil authority is well understood and unquestioned. This however refers to political and not bureaucratic control. The Army leadership should form part of the decision making loop in matters of national security and in matters which concern the functioning of the Force. This is not forthcoming so far. The Army feels that many in the decision making process do not have a full understanding of matters military. The decision making authorities feel that Army is rigid, that there is lack of continuity in key appointments, and that Army is aggressive when it wants to push. Many also feel that knowledge of Armed Forces is not necessary to make decisions; this perception needs to be corrected. The Indian Army is perhaps the only Army which is outside the decision making loop on matters which affect them.

When deployed in CI/CT areas, the Army is sensitive to the needs of the local population and conducts its operations accordingly. There is a foreign hand in the insurgencies which we are facing which needs to be understood. As part of building bridges with the local population the Army has been conducting outreach efforts through 'Operation Sadbhavana' and 'Operation Samaritan'. Both have been well received. The Army also has an excellent track record on the issue of Human Rights. In a large force, there will be aberrations but action on complaints are swiftly investigated and if found true, appropriate action is taken.

The Army is held in high esteem by other countries for its professionalism and dedication. They however do express surprise at the Army's exclusion in the decision making process as The Indian Army is perhaps the only Army which is so placed.

To improve the self image of Indian Army there is a need for synergy in perception management. Presently there is no perception management policy at national and armed forces levels. Within the armed forces, there is no synergy between the DPR and other branches. The second issue is accountability and prompt response. The third issue is the need for more interaction with media. This is now being propagated by the Army. The Army also needs to keep pace with new communication means such as the social media. Army has to develop balanced focus on international, national and regional media and indulge in image building through documentaries, films, TV shows, radio, books etc.

We need to understand the conflict of interests which arises naturally between the media and the Army. The former wants information which the latter may not desire to give. We need to be sensitive to media concerns but at the same time need to ensure

that sensitive data is secure. In any event, greater media interaction is the need of the hour.

Role of Media in Perception Management: Nitin A Gokhale (*Security and Strategic Affairs Editor, NDTV*)

The previous speaker said that media has a tendency to sensationalise, to look at negative aspects much more and to look at aspects that are not very palatable to the armed forces. I think it is in the nature of the media and nature of the news that good news really does not make news. It is always the bad news, the negative which attracts attention. It is a human voyeuristic tendency to look at your neighbour/society's problems much more closely than you look at the positive things and that's the nature of the media. The natural divergence/cultural differences between media and military must be understood which is not something new.

Field Marshal Joseph Garnet Wolseley who led the British forces in the battle of Crimea in 1869 commented on William Howard Russell of the London Times, who was the first war correspondent in modern history, who was living and travelling with the troops and was sending his reports by telegram back to headquarters in London in these words – 'Those newly invented curse to armies who eat all the rations of the fighting man and do no work at all'. Yet it was the reporting of Russell which led to positive reforms being made in the British forces.

Gen Andrew Goodpaster, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during the World War II spoke of the dilemma in these words – 'While there is—or should be—a natural convergence of interests in providing to the public accurate information about our armed forces and what they do, there is at the same time an inherent clash of interests (especially acute when men are fighting and dying) between military leaders responsible for success in battle and for the lives of their commands, and a media intensely competitive in providing readers and viewers with quick and vivid 'news' and opinion...'

All soldiers who lead their men in battle face this dilemma.

There is a cultural divide and a clash of cultures between the military and the media. The media in a sense is possibly the most organised anarchists going around. Military personnel are bound by rules, regulations, punctuality and absolute discipline and in that sense could be referred to as 'control freaks'. Army needs everything organised and laid out. In the media there is organised chaos. So this is a struggle between an anarchist media and control freaks which brings about dissonance. There are a lot of cultural differences in the upbringing of the media personnel vis a vis men in uniform. This has to be understood if Army has to deal with media as part of perception management. The military's job is based on secrecy and media's task is to unearth information. While military flourishes on rules, media thrives on 'less is more' norms.

Media people do a lot of things which may not be palatable to military. Military wants total obedience; media's role is to question authority. In media there is a lot of freedom, up to an extent; the hierarchy is very flat and therefore there are different perceptions.

In the early years till 1960-61, the media was generally conformist. It was a phase of nation building; The politico-military debacle in 1962 changed perceptions and the media started questioning the decision makers due to their faulty policies and dubious decisions. 1971 War and Pokharan-1 brought much more focus on defence and national security matters and the Armed Forces. The media focus has only increased with the years and will continue to do so. However, larger issues do get sidelined in cacophony of trivia. This happens because there is lack of training and exposure on both sides.

The Army is slow in sending its message across which is why it is for the most part playing 'catch up'. There is a need to be more proactive. The Army also appears to suffer from a personality oriented approach which swings from one end to the other. The media handling is not institutionalised and there is a lack of issue based approach in media policy. The armed forces are apparently hampered by the outdated and selective media engagement policy of the MoD. There is a contrast between the way the MHA and the MoD deal with the media. In MHA the Additional Director General media and communication is constantly engaging with the media through text messages, e mails, alerts and always batting for the Para Military forces that come under the MHA. In contrast, the DPR officer does not render the same level of support to the Army. The existing set up is also not designed for a swift response. Vertical silos lead to delay and the space by then has been occupied by the military's adversary.

The media can play an important role in changing perceptions as witnessed in the support given to the Armed Forces over the raw deal given to them in the 6th Pay commission. The message flashed by the media – 'Will the forces face a black Diwali'? helped to sensitise an obdurate government and the Services were given their due. A well managed perception management campaign can deliver excellent results. But the Military needs to comprehend how to use the power of the media in propagating its theme.

The 1971 war was the best example of military-media synergy. In a well thought out manner, foreign correspondents were sent in to the then East Pakistan with the help of the Mukti Bahini as the politico military leadership wanted to justify the military intervention in the then East Pakistan. Such synergy needs to be the norm rather than the exception. The role of the media came for a lot of criticism in the coverage of the Mumbai attacks. However, there was a bigger failure on the part of the authorities with senior officials from the Government and military speaking in different voices. There needs to be a central authority coordinating crisis situations to avoid such incidents.

The model of perception management adopted by Sri Lankan army may not be applicable in India but they were clear as to what they wanted to achieve in this aspect. They created a firewall in the North and restricted the access for two reasons; They were successful and beat the Tamil Tigers at their own game.

Today, 24x7 TV channels and networks are a part of the Indian reality and cannot be wished away. Dealing with broadcast media requires expertise and resources which the Army must create. It must also be more responsive if it wishes its message to get out first. More meaningful and open interaction is required between the military and the media and the issue of centralisation of authority addressed. However, by nature, both the military and media are adversarial in nature. Media's job is to unearth information, lacunae and shortcomings anywhere and in any organisation and military's is not to give it up. This only supports the case for more media interaction and not less. In CI/CT operations, regional language media should be the first priority for the military. Military should engage with them when it goes to a new area like it does with political leaders, doctors, lawyers, local religious leader etc. A similar approach with similar agenda should be adopted with local media, if military wants to really reap the benefits of engaging with the media.

People's Perception of Indian Army: Mr Iftikhar Gilani

Frequent deployment of Army in aid to civil authorities and combating insurgencies is not a good idea. In J&K, the sight of military men deployed on roadside conducting checks and frisking civilians has degraded the image of Army. It has primarily happened due to their prolonged deployment in that area. The continued presence of Army in J&K is adversely affecting its image in front of local populace. The Army personnel deployed in J&K should not overlook the fact that they are not operating against enemy but our own people who may have been subverted. The locals may be occasionally providing support to terrorists due to various compulsions but by and large all civilians can't be treated as enemy.

The instances of civil vehicles not being allowed to overtake army vehicles or civil vehicles being forcibly taken by army personnel for operations have tarnished the image of army in past. However, situation has improved to a large extent now. Presently, there is zero tolerance for human right violations in J&K; hence army has to be very careful in their conduct. The local populace doesn't really understand the difference between army and BSF or any other para military forces. Any incident of human right violations is attributed by civilians to the Army; hence need for proactive approach by Army.

The senior army officers in J&K should immediately reach out to local populace in case of any unintentional misconduct by army personnel. One recent incident of apology by GOC 15 Corps has helped Army to connect with the local populace and damage was

controlled. Operation Sadbhavana has been a big relief to local populace. However, now it needs to be backed by political initiative and involve local populace in running it. It is recommended that local panchayat /Sarpanch should be incorporated in running the schemes started by Army under Operation Sadbhavana. Ironically, state government in J&K is opposing Panchayats which is the corner stone of democracy in India. It needs to be preserved. In J&K the situation has been relatively peaceful when people had chosen their own representatives. Some states like Maharashtra have quotas for Kashmiri Pandits which needs to be applied to all Kashmiris for universal application. It is also recommended that a soldier before being inducted into J&K for operations should be sensitised towards aspirations of local populace. He should be educated about Islam and local culture and customs. The local population needs to be empowered to run their own affairs. The 'prison mindset' has to be eradicated from J&K. The fear has gone from J&K but the forces are still there. The time has come to think about reducing the quantum of forces.

BGS (IW) Eastern Command

The Northeast has remained a neglected region, both in terms of development and in terms of our national consciousness. The eight states in Northeast India all have a different set of dynamics and each needs to be addressed accordingly. In Nagaland, anti Army feeling which was strong a few decades back no longer prevails though this thought process is still being encouraged and influenced by NSCN leaders. Manipur has been neglected by the Centre but the Army carries a good image in this state. The pro Naga stance of central government has further alienated the locals. The common man is disillusioned with militancy and wants normalcy to be back. Assam has a positive response towards army. The people are fed up with militancy. The army has achieved major successes in the state. In Arunachal Pradesh there is strong nationalistic feeling towards India and the locals respect the Army. The influence of NSCN can however be felt in East Arunachal Pradesh (Tirap and Changlang) due to political compulsions. The general problem is that people from Northeast India is a question of identity. Perception management needs to change stereotype attitudes to bring about integration to a greater degree. Politically, NE doesn't affect the balance of power in Centre and hence there is no sincerity in efforts to resolve militancy. The army has a very important role to play in making them think otherwise. The regional parties are important today due to coalition government; therefore, look 'North East' policy has been started by centre which was not there earlier.

Col (IW) Central Command

The current situation continues to be volatile in Chhattisgarh. The situation is unlikely to improve in the near term. The state government is however stable and taking effective steps to bring the situation under control. Presently sense of security is low amongst

local populace in this state. No perceptible success has been achieved till date by the government and security forces. The Army's presence may mitigate problem of sense of low security. However, local population guided by various compulsions is opposing the deployment of security forces. They have been organising anti army propaganda and Bandhs have been called to protest against deployment of army. The army presently has only limited strength deployed in the state and conducting only manoeuvre training to showcase their footprint to Naxals. The Army has been making efforts to spread awareness in the Naxal affected areas. More number of army institutions are being planned in this area to instil a sense of security. The requirement of a concerted and cohesive strategy against the Naxals however is a pressing need and must be initiated at the earliest.

BGS (IW) Northern Command

Though J&K is located at the border/fringes of India it has always remained at the heart of our consciousness. The political situation in J&K is peculiar since only two main political parties have been in power. There is no scope for any other party which hampers the democratic development of the state as a whole. The populace has become educated now and is aware of their rights; hence their expectations have also gone up. The resounding success of Panchayat elections clearly points towards the changed environment in the state. The election for urban local bodies is due in April this year which is likely to further improve the democratic situation in the state. The issue of unmarked graves in the valley has not been properly covered by the media. Few isolated graves have been found in the Valley which was used to bury the militants killed in operations. The Army remains sensitive to the needs of the local population and continues to carry out people friendly operations. The 'Awami Mulaquat' being conducted by Army to facilitate interaction with local populace has yielded positive results. In these meetings, even civil administration representatives take part who are otherwise not accessible to local population. Operation Sadbhavana has been very popular in the state but now the time has come to hand it over to local populace and Army should only assist them in its running.

Discussion

The embedded journalism is not likely to be successful in operational areas of army since media doesn't have time and inclination to be stationed permanently in remote areas. They would come only when something sensational happens.

The presence of army in counter insurgency affected areas is not intimidating as perceived by a section of intelligentsia. The local population has no grievance to the Army presence which is touted more by the people living in the bigger towns where the Army has no presence.

The media and army blame game will not take us anywhere. The Army will have to find ways to project its viewpoint in a faster timeframe. The training of war correspondents including of regional media needs to be done regularly.

India as country has not projected its war heroes properly. It is disheartening that most of army war heroes/ important battle histories are not known to army personnel also. It is recommended that their life history and heroic deeds must be included in the school curriculum.