INDIA'S LAW AND ORDER MATRIX NEEDS A REBOOT

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February 11, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 08:36 am IST

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The All India Conference of Directors General/Inspectors General of Police, in New Delhi | Photo Credit: ANI

The annual All India Conference of Directors General/Inspectors General of Police which was held recently, witnessed a departure from the past, when some aspects that were discussed found their way into the public domain. This led to an element of controversy over the management of certain issues, specially on the border, but little else. In its present form, the DGPs/IGPs conference is a relatively new construct (1980), superseding the earlier annual conference of Heads of Intelligence and CIDs of different States. The latter conference used to deal mainly with the nitty-gritty of police work, viz., intelligence, crime and criminal investigation, technology and the forensic aspects, while the conference now additionally deals with a host of other issues including Policy and personnel matters.

The proliferation of subjects up for discussion in recent conferences, and the presence of increasing numbers of delegates to cover the various subjects leave little scope for any in-depth discussion. Today's security threats have an all-embracing character and there is a crying need for in-depth discussions on futuristic themes in policing, such as cyber crime, the dark web, crypto, maritime security, the threat from drones, and also problems stemming from an unchecked social media. These are in addition to subjects such as left-wing extremism, counter-terrorism, drug trafficking and border issues. Lack of adequate time to discuss these matters in detail tend to undermine both the quality of the debates and possible outcomes.

Admittedly, we may not be standing today at the beginning of history, but the evolving security scenario is producing a myriad of internal and external challenges. As the 21st century advances, security problems will grow at an exponential rate. Their dimensions are as yet unclear, but what is already evident is that the emerging challenges would require greater innovativeness and agility as well as a demonstration of newer cognitive skills to meet the challenges posed by swift technological change and the rise of data war fighting. Hence, decision making in these circumstances needs to undergo fundamental changes, entailing more purposive discussion at higher levels.

Law and order management today would be a good starting point in this context. This subject may appear rather mundane in a world dominated by technology; but what it currently demands is a combination of newer skills, in both technology and crowd management, which are not readily available among security agencies. The attention of most security forces in the country

has essentially been devoted to ongoing threats such as terrorism, which has resulted in law and order management being put on the back burner. Managing today's angry, and often unruly, mobs requires a fresh set of skills and inherent abilities, apart from mere technology. A heavy-handed approach tends to create more problems than they solve. Any approach of this kind only leads to a catastrophic divide between law enforcement agencies and the public, at a time when newer practices and skills are the proper answer.

Hence, much more is clearly required than simply reiterating that technology, including artificial intelligence, can provide answers to a host of problems that exist. Understanding the psychology of agitating mobs and, in turn making them realise the dangers of their own predilections before matters get out of hand, is not an innate, but an acquired skill. This needs better attention.

Police and security agencies, must consequently, be provided with the right attributes, and for which they need to be adequately trained. This would call for a top down approach, as there would be considerable competition of resources from within the agencies for other items such as advances in weaponry and technology. It would be required even more, to secure acceptance of utilitarian aspects of any such move.

The selection of personnel to security agencies, especially the police, also will require a total makeover. The 21st century is proving to be vastly different from the 20th century, and the choice of personnel to man security agencies requires more high-level attention than has been devoted to this task. Most of the debate on this subject has been outside, rather than within the police forces, and the higher echelons of the forces have not spent enough time in determining what can and needs to be done. The police forces must mirror the kind of society we live in today, and must be capable of dealing with today's modern antagonists. The latter often employ a variety of tactics and skills, and use common imagery to keep track of developing situations, including on social media and Twitter. For the police and security forces, this means that more than the mere acquisition of new skills, they must develop a different mind set, including that force cannot be the answer to every situation.

Technological advances worldwide have meant that the human skills of security agencies need to be suitably tailored to a world in which the Internet, social media and other breakthroughs, often provide protestors and agitators an upper hand, and often detrimental to law and order. This has given rise to the importance of 'Open Source intelligence' that is often neglected by security agencies. The proper utilisation of Open Source intelligence could well become the critical factor in managing many law and order situations today. A vast gap exists at present between the need, and on how best to utilise information from open sources.

An added problem, apart from the existing cauldron of events, incidents and situations, is the presence of multiple security agencies, including intelligence and investigative agencies, who seldom act with a common purpose. Their techniques and methodologies tend to be different, often leading to contradictions in approach. While the proliferation of agencies was intended to create specialised agencies for special requirements, this has not happened. Far from easing the burden of individual agencies, they often hinder proper analysis and investigation.

Hence, what is clear is that there is a very real need to take a hard look at not only improving the nature of the security discourse — in regard to the range and varieties of threats — but also on how to bring about changes in regard to intelligence techniques, investigative methodologies, improving the ground situation, etc. Conventional wisdom would suggest that an apex level meeting of DGPs/IGPs would provide the necessary direction and policy imperatives. The reality is that too broad a sweep, both in terms of the subjects discussed, as well as in the numbers present, tends to affect the quality of the discourse even among dedicated professionals. Meaningful discussions cannot occur when the size of the conference inhibits detailed and frank

discussion even in a professional atmosphere. Here, as in many other aspects of life, 'small is beautiful'.

In short order, it can be said that there is a case for splitting the annual conference of DGPs/IGPs into two separate conferences — a higher level conference of DGPs/IGPs to discuss policy related issues, and a separate conference to be held of intelligence and security specialists (IGs/CID) to discuss the finer points of methodology, techniques and acquisition of new skills for current and future problems. Outcomes would then become more relevant to current and future security needs.

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