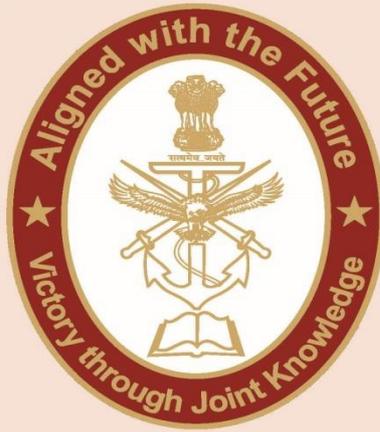


CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



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EXPLOITING MILITARY DIPLOMACY



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The successful visit of the army chief, General MM Naravane, to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, last week, brought to fore benefits of military diplomacy for India. Pakistan, where the army rules the country, has always adopted military diplomacy as a means of conveying government directions. Bajwa was even present when Imran Khan had formal discussions with Trump. Most visitors to Pakistan conduct photo-ops in Islamabad and formal talks in Rawalpindi.

General Bajwa had rushed to Saudi Arabia to apologize to the leadership after the threatening burst by their foreign minister, SM Qureshi, against the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) not calling a meeting on Kashmir. It was evident he wished to display his antagonism on the actions of his political hierarchy. He was denied an audience with the Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman, whom he has specifically gone to apologize, and ended up meeting the defence minister.

The US employs its theatre command commanders effectively for military diplomacy in nations within regions of their command. The intention is to enhance joint exercises and share security and intelligence inputs,

projecting American soft power and professionalism. They also convey US concerns on security aspects within and in the vicinity of these countries as also a strong message in case of actions against US interests.

India conducts joint exercises and provides vacancies in Indian training institutes to friendly nations. These area means of projecting military soft power, apart from displaying military capabilities and professionalism. The participants comprehend Indian views on security. International students at Indian military establishments always carry fond memories of their stay. Participating in UN missions is also a means of projecting Indian soft power and professionalism. Indian units employed by the UN have always been admired for their determination to ensure results. They have always been in demand in major trouble spots.

India, in the past, had always been cautious on exploiting military visits as a tool of foreign policy. Indian Ambassadors and High Commissioners though have gained from tasking Military Attachés for conducting military aspects of diplomacy. Globally, wherever the armed forces provide stability to democracy, military diplomacy would always be more effective as a diplomatic tool. It is easier for military men to create a bond and understand concerns rather than with career diplomats. In recent years, the defence ministry has enrolled its military attaches as ambassadors for the Indian defence industry.

For the last few years, almost every visit of the Prime Minister resulted in signing of economic and joint military training pacts. Thus, apart from enhancing diplomatic ties, economies are linked alongside security aspects, aimed at projecting Indian military soft power and professionalism. Every year the number of nations seeking military collaboration with India is on the rise.

Naravane had initially visited Myanmar along with the foreign secretary, Harsh Vardhan Shringla. He had been the Military Attaché there, knew the country's culture as also the relationship between democracy and military power. Naravane separately met the Vice Senior General Soe Win, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Myanmar Armed Services, while the foreign secretary met U Soe Han, Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

Myanmar, an ideal combination of politico-military diplomacy. Security relations and army to army contact remains an integral part of India-Myanmar ties.

An Indian statement post the visit read, 'The two sides discussed maintenance of security and stability in their border areas and reiterated their mutual commitment not to allow their respective territories to be used for activities inimical to each other. The Indian side expressed their appreciation to Myanmar for handing over of 22 cadres of Indian Insurgent Groups to India.'

In 2019, India and Myanmar had conducted synergised operations against insurgents on either side of the border. During the operation, both sides had deployed liaison officers in the other's operations rooms for better coordination. The groups targeted included, NSCN(K), ULFA, NDFB and PLA, as well as anti-Myanmar entities in the Chin State bordering Mizoram. There is no doubt that the visit, Naravane's first politico-military diplomacy, was a success.

Naravane next visited Nepal. His visit was between the visits of the RAW chief, Samant Goel, and the foreign secretary. It was possibly aimed at creating conditions for moving forward relations between the two countries and setting aside differences. He would have carried a positive message from the Indian government. The two nations have always had close military ties, despite growing political differences, including the cartographic war. The Nepal army had refused to comment on Naravane's statement on the Lipulekh issue. The success of the visit could be gauged from the forward movement of diplomatic ties. In both, Nepal and Myanmar the armed forces play a major role in ensuring a stable country.

In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the visit focussed on establishing security coordination, joint training and exercises as also sale and joint production of defence equipment. In other words, it was aimed at pushing Pak influence away from the region. Saudi Arabia and UAE delegations had attended the Indian defence expo in Feb this year. The Saudi's envisaged interest in the Kalyani manufactured 155 mm Gun system, Bharat 52, apart from other equipment. The UAE is keen for producing their Caracal carbines in India

under the 'Make in India' program. Both nations have expressed a desire to procure the Brahmos missiles.

The army chief's visit to Saudi Arabia and The UAE has impacted Pakistan as it visualizes a loss of space. The Pakistan former defence minister, General Naeem Lodhi, stated, in a television interview, that the visit is a matter of concern for Pakistan. For Pakistan, this visit was a strong message that both these nations, traditional supporters of Pakistan, will no longer depend on it alone and are seeking other options. It also displays India's growing involvement in the region. India has been conducting joint naval exercises with these countries since 2018. The visit further conveys that Kashmir will never be an issue, a major setback for Pakistan. It was also a rebuke to Pakistan moving closer to Turkey.

General Rawat, as the army chief, had visited Bangladesh in 2017 and General Naravane visited as an army commander in March last year. The current army vice chief, Lt General SK Saini, addressed the Bangladesh National Defence Course early this month. He is an alumni of this course. These visits and addresses enhance bilateral ties and convey Indian security concerns.

Military diplomacy is an ideal means of enhancing security ties, projecting capabilities of the Indian defence industry, Indian armed forces professionalism, as also conveying Indian security concerns. India had for long avoided exploiting military diplomacy, restricting visits of senior officials to only military institutes and establishments. It is time to change and they need to be involved in playing a larger role in global diplomacy. A closer coordination between the MEA and the Department of Military Affairs is the order of the day.

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