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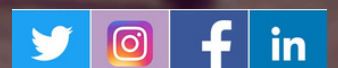
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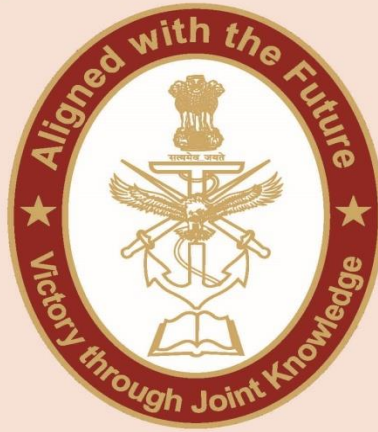
HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF THE CAPF

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HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF THE CAPF



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“Like the ‘Whole of the Government’ approach for a self-reliant India, ‘Whole of the Nation’ approach is the need of the hour for the defence of the Nation”.

-Hon’ble PM Narendra Modi, 18 Jul 22¹

Background

Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) were formerly known as Central Para-Military Forces (CPMF), and have also been referred to as Central Police Organizations (CPOs), Para-Military Forces (PMF) and Central Police Forces (CPF) at different times. However, in 2011, the Government released a circular adopting a uniform nomenclature and changed the name of these forces from PMF to CAPF, under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). This change was primarily necessitated to classify and demarcate these distinct forces as structured formal organizations, since in some countries the term ‘Paramilitary’ refers to ‘militant groups’.^{2 3} Initially, only five forces i.e. Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Special Service Bureau (SSB) were covered under the new classification. However subsequently, all seven forces including the Assam Rifles (AR) and National Security Guard (NSG) were incorporated under the definition of CAPF, by the MHA.⁴

It is well appreciated that India's security landscape is shaped by a complex array of challenges spread over a wide spectrum; it includes border management, terrorism and internal security, amongst other threats. The Indian Army and the CAPF have specific and assigned roles, which however, are not mutually exclusive and overlap on a number of issues. The CAPFs perform a host of functions, the two principal tasks being, guarding the borders and ensuring internal security of the nation; these tasks are common, not only to the CAPFs, but equally applicable to the Armed Forces too. However, not surprisingly, these organizations more or less function in secluded silos, obviating both intra and inter synergy. In these times of multiple challenges and uncertainty, a Unified National Strategy and a Whole of Nation approach is imperative, to ensure optimum utilization of resources to achieve the desired impact. It is therefore important that we not only work towards integration amongst CAPFs, but also their integration and synergy with the Armed Forces, in general, and the Indian Army (IA), in particular.

Overview of CAPFs⁵

All the CAPFs (except AR) are under the operational and administrative control of the MHA. AR is an exception and has remained under the operational control of the Indian Army since 1962. CAPFs can be broadly classified as per their primary roles into the following three sub-sets:-

- **Border Guarding Force.** Under the “*One Border, One Force*” principle, BSF is responsible for the borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh, ITBP safeguards the Sino-Indian borders, SSB looks after the borders with Nepal and Bhutan, while AR covers our borders with Myanmar. The IA provides a robust back-up to the BSF in safeguarding the LC – ‘the live’ section of the India-Pakistan border in J&K and assists the ITBP in defending the LAC with China.⁶
- **Internal Security.** CRPF and CISF.
- **Special Task Force.** NSG.

Let us assess the salient aspects of these CAPFs.

Assam Rifles (AR)⁷

It is the oldest PMF which was raised in 1835 as the militia, 'Cashar Levy' for protecting the British Tea Estates; its name was subsequently changed to Assam Rifles in 1917. It functioned under the MEA after Independence, however, after the Sino-India War of 1962, its operational control was transferred to the Indian Army and the administrative control to the MHA. The AR is a very large force with a sanctioned strength of over 65,000 personnel and 46 battalions. Its main role is border management along the India - Myanmar Border, conduct of Counter Insurgency operations and maintaining Law and Order. During war, it has the capability and capacity to undertake operations in close concert with the IA. Its weapons and equipment inventory is similar to the IA.

BSF

After the India - Pakistan War of 1965, the BSF was raised as a unified central agency, with a specific mandate of guarding India's international borders. Raised with barely 26 battalions, the BSF is now the world's largest Border Guarding Force with a strength of over 2.65 lakh personnel and 193 battalions, including artillery regiments and an air wing. Its main role is to ensure border management along the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders. It also assists in anti-infiltration and Counter Insurgency/ Counter Terrorism (CI/ CT) roles. During operations the BSF is mandated to assist the Indian Army in defensive roles and for protection of vital installations, amongst host of other functions. It holds weapons and equipment which are akin to the IA.

ITBP⁸

ITBP was formally raised in Oct 1962 in the wake of the Chinese aggression. Initially conceptualized as a 'Guerilla Fighting Force', it has evolved into a potent Border Guarding Force along the Indo-Tibetan Border with a substantial sanctioned strength. Its main role is border management along the Chinese border. It is also mandated to perform CI/IS duties, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), VIP security tasks and intelligence collection. ITBP is tasked to assist the IA in defensive operations and protection of vital installations, during war. It holds weapons and equipment which are quite similar to the IA.

SSB⁹

SSB was raised in March 1963 after the India-China conflict under the Cabinet Sectt, with an aim of achieving '*total security preparedness*' in the remote border areas and performing a '*stay behind*' role in the event of a war. It was subsequently shifted under the MHA in 2001 and its role too evolved over time; it is now responsible for '*border management of India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders*' and collection of intelligence. The weapons and equipment in its inventory are quite similar to the IA.

CRPF¹⁰

This is the oldest and the largest CAPF which was raised in 1939 as the '*Crown Representatives Police*', to quell political unrest and agitations in the Princely states. CRPF has a sanctioned strength of over 3.2 lakh personnel and 246 battalions. Though primarily tasked for internal security, including crowd control, election duty, protection of VAs/ VPs etc, it is suitably equipped and capable of fighting the enemy in event of a war. It holds a number of weapons and equipment which match its task profile, but are reasonably similar to the IA.

CISF¹¹

CISF was raised in 1968 to provide security cover to industrial units, government infrastructure projects and other establishments like airports, oil refineries, ports, atomic and power plants etc. With a sanctioned strength of 1,80,000 personnel and 426 battalions, CISF is also mandated to provide security to nominated private and cooperative establishments, for a fee, with effect from 2009.

NSG¹²

NSG was raised in 1984 to combat all facets of terrorism as a Federal Contingency Force. It is a task-oriented force, having two complementary arms viz Special Action Group (SAG) and Special Ranger Group (SRG), drawing personnel from the Indian Army and CAPF/ SPF, respectively. It has a sanctioned strength of approximately 9000 personnel; SAG and SRG hold specialized weapons aligned to their tasking and role.

CAPFs : A Case for Integration

“Should we go ahead and think about jointness in our CPOs (Central Police Organizations/ Central Armed Police Forces) interoperability. We are a huge force together, we have also got the same type of inter-mingling duties at many places.... if we have to deploy CAPF, it does not matter if BSF is not available, CRPF can do the same thing....”

-Ajit Doval, NSA, 24 May 2024¹³

Historically, CAPFs have operated with a great degree of autonomy, each focusing on their specific mandates. While their specialization has allowed for expertise to grow in various fields, it has also led to challenges of fragmented operations, overlapping jurisdictions and inefficient resource utilization. However, complex security threats encompass many domains now and therefore necessitates a more coherent and integrated approach to national security.

Let us analyze the commonalities amongst the CAPFs which can facilitate addressing these threats jointly:-

- All CAPFs function under the overarching umbrella of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), which is responsible for their centralized control and coordination.
- Broadly the primary roles and responsibilities of Border Guarding Forces and (to an extent CRPF) are comparable. Their organisation, functioning and ethos are also quite similar. CAPFs have a history of having been employed with a great deal of flexibility and success in interchangeable roles, both during peace (CI/ CT, riot control, HADR, VA/ VP protection, VIP security, etc) and war (1962, 1965, 1971, 1999).
- The cadre of all CAPFs (except AR), is more or less organized on parallel lines, with senior level appointments being heavily populated by the IPS and the balance by the integral cadre.

- Training, though imparted at different (more than 50) training establishments, is broadly aligned to a largely complementary syllabus, except for the specialized training.
- All CAPFs hold identical weapons (INSAS, LMGs, Rocket Launcher, Mortars etc), vehicles, equipment and communication devices; minor variations, where they exist, are necessitated due to the specialised roles. Further, the procurement of major weapons, equipment and vehicles has been harmonized over a period of time, ensuring uniformity in inventory and inter-operability.
- Due to similarities in their roles, organization and requirements, CAPFs often share logistical support and intelligence inputs to coordinate their responses.
- Last, but not the least, all the CAPFs are organised in an almost similar manner. Each battalion has 6-7 companies and the strength of each battalion is more than 1250 personnel. Even beyond the battalion they are organised in an analogous hierarchical structure right from a Sector to Frontier/ Command/ Zone and Force HQ.

It is therefore evident that the CAPFs, though functioning in their own monolithic silos, have a great deal of complementarity in their organization, weapons, equipment and operating procedures. A strong case for integrating the CAPFs therefore does exist. Mr Ajit Doval, NSA, echoing the growing chorus of voices, propagating integration and synergy amongst the CAPFs (and Armed Forces), spoke at the Investiture Ceremony of BSF in May 2024, and re-iterated that “*jointness (integration)*” was the way forward for CAPFs; it was not only about saving money but also bringing in homogeneity in deployment, whether during war or peace. He went on to elaborate “*.....we should think about jointness in our CPOs/ CAPFs interoperability. Together we are a huge force now (more than one million), we also have the same type of inter-mingling duties at many places, whether it is procurement, communication, training, standardization whenever there is a requirement, in war or peace, and if we have to deploy 30 battalions of CAPFs, it does not matter if BSF is not available, CRPF can do the same thing, they have been trained and their equipment and communication devices are same*”.¹⁴

It is therefore time that the CAPFs functioned as a more integrated entity. The advantages of operational efficiency, intelligence sharing, efficient resource utilisation, common training and resultant cost optimization, far outweigh the challenges of diverse organizational cultures, differing jurisdictions and entrenched interests. An integrated CAPF entity with a unified command HQ at helm, will not only efficiently coordinate peace time exigencies, but equally importantly, *facilitate synergised functioning with the IA during war.*

Integration of the 'Invisible Army' with IA

“The spotlight is suddenly on the CAPFs. There are huge, varied, nuanced national security challenges; some have confronted India for long, some have evolved to peak into criticalities... like the China-Pakistan two front threat, where for the first time, both have joined hands... CAPFs therefore are now the pivot and lodestar to counter gargantuan security challenges...”

- Rohit Singh¹⁵, Author

The CAPFs have often been referred to as the 'Nations Invisible Army' and not without reason; AR, ITBP, BSF and CRPF are disciplined and experienced forces who have valiantly participated in wars with China and Pakistan, with distinction. It is therefore important that the CAPFs are prepared and oriented to contribute meaningfully in any future conflict too.

This facet gets further accentuated due to two critical, and inter-related realities. Firstly, a two (and a half) front war is a distinct possibility and must be planned for; Secondly, tackling this grave reality, obviously requires a far larger body of troops, than a conventionally planned for 'single front'. To add to this matrix, is an undeniable fact - the IA is overstretched much more than ever before; this situation, with multiple deployments on the LC/LAC/IB/hinterland and in newer areas of conflict, especially along the Northern Borders, is likely to persist. These two factors combined, could result in the IA being geographically hemmed and confined, thereby inhibiting its flexibility to shift and employ forces in different theatres. Therefore, to unshackle the

potential of the IA and give it much needed flexibility and freedom to move and prosecute proactive operations, accretional troops will be required to relieve it of certain (defensive) tasks and take on additional tasks (hinterland security, opening lines of communication, security of VAs/VPs etc), during war.

Therefore, the big question - where are these additional troops going to come from? Mustering them from within the IA resources, more so when the strength of IA has remained static (or even reduced), is not a prudent or a practical option. We thus require to look beyond IA, for troops which can efficiently take on some of the tasks from the IA during war. It is equally important that the earmarked troops thereafter are earnestly oriented, trained, kitted and integrated with IA.

We have already analysed that CAPFs by virtue of their organisation, strength, weapons, equipment and experience are well poised to take on this onerous responsibility. They have done so earlier, and the harsh current realities warrant a 'doubling down' of this effort. This aspiration is pragmatic and practical, moreso, when the capability and capacity of CAPFs has only increased manifold, since the last war of 1999.

Devesh Kapur, has correctly observed; *'keeping in mind the HR Policy and optimisation underway in IA, it is imperative that the tasks performed by the CAPFs and State Police are upgraded, based on Capability Development carried out'*.¹⁶ The facts speak for themselves.

The strength of CAPFs has almost doubled, to a million troops, over the last two decades. From being merely 50% of the IA in 1996, CAPFs today are the same size (98%) of IA. Even, if we consider only the Border Guarding Forces, they constitute more than 45% of the IA strength. Important to note is that the budget of CAPFs has also increased substantially; almost one lakh crore rupees was allocated to CAPFs in the budget for Financial Year 2024-25.¹⁷

As far as the organization of CAPFs is concerned, it has evolved to be analogous to the IA, from the level of a company and a battalion, right upto a Sector, Frontier/ Zone and Force HQ. A CAPF battalion, in fact, has almost one-third more troops than an IA infantry battalion and is accordingly a repository of much more firepower. Their

vehicles, equipment, communication devices too have kept pace with technology and times. Efforts are underway to align the weapons, vehicles, equipment and communication systems of CAPFs even more closely to the IA. Similarly, the enhanced absorption of veterans and Agniveers, in future, will further ensure greater congruence, understanding and interoperability amongst the two forces.

Optimum planning and utilization of these resources, substantially boosted qualitatively and quantitatively, at a considerable cost and effort, is therefore a non-negotiable imperative, both during war and peace.

As we have seen, a number of enabling factors to facilitate effective functioning of CAPFs with IA during war, are already, in place. However, a critical 'missing link' has been the training and orientation of the CAPFs towards their war time tasks. This can primarily be attributed to the CAPFs (except AR), being confined to a predominantly Policing and Border Guarding role for a prolonged period, now. Their deep involvement in peace time tasks, which undoubtedly are equally important, has however, been at the expense of military oriented training and integration with IA; neglect of these important facets, over many years, has drastically denuded their capability to function efficiently alongside the IA and contribute effectively during war. This is all the more important on two accounts viz the CAPFs will inevitably get sucked into the overall troop matrix of a wartime effort; thus we cannot afford to have troops who are well kitted and equipped but insufficiently trained and inadequately integrated with a force, with whom they have to operate (IA). Therefore, inspite of identifying major infirmities in troop linkages, we cannot allow the CAPF to walk into any future war with 'eyes wide shut'. Resuscitating military training of CAPFs, under the current circumstances, is therefore the single most critical factor, to orient and prepare them for a national security contingency. Further, we must appreciate and be mindful of the fact that, integration does not mean a '*merger*' of entities, it merely implies '*infusing synergy*' amongst entities. An assurance to this effect, will put to rest any apprehensions, if any, amongst the CAPFs, and facilitate closer functioning with IA.

It is thus evident that a very significant and empowered pool of manpower and resources are available, which must be 'planned for', 'prepared for' and 'utilised for' a National emergency. It is also aptly clear that congruence between the IA and CAPFs far exceeds the divergences. It will therefore be a travesty, if we allow the humongous

potential of the CAPFs to be wasted, withered away or under utilized during a war. Importantly, as the Armed Forces move inexorably towards theaterised structures, it is imperative that CAPFs too find an appropriate place in the overarching security architecture.

Rohit Singh correctly states *“The CAPFs today occupy India’s National Security landscape; they have to become a viable national security instrument to enable the Armed Forces to provide deterrence to a rising China, which is increasingly cohorting militarily with Pakistan. Will the CAPF be the Phalanx it is meant to be?”*¹⁸ Under these circumstances, having a large proportion of CAPF Left Out of Battle (LoB) due to lack of planning, integration, training or simply not foreseeing their employment during war, is simply not an option.

It must be appreciated that the endeavour to integrate CAPFs in the National Security Architecture is not unique to India; many nations have already done so efficiently. USA’s Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and National Guard (NG), the Israeli Border Police (IBP), People’s Armed Police (PAP) of PRC, Gendarmerie of France, Army Reserves of UK are all well established and efficiently functioning ‘CAPFs’, which are also deeply meshed and integrated with their respective national Armed Forces. As our security structures mature and refine, we too must ensure that the CAPFs are well geared and prepared to function alongside IA and contribute towards a national wartime effort.

Conclusion

“War does not start the day you start fighting, it starts the day you start planning”.

-General Upendra Dwivedi, COAS, 2024¹⁹

Rapid evolution of threats, spread over a complex spectrum, from across the borders to terrorism, from insurgency to ‘new age’ challenges, covering financial, cyber and EM spheres, have necessitated a more integrated and coherent approach to security. This aspect gets further accentuated due to two stark realities, firstly, a distinct possibility of a two (and half) front war *and* secondly, the requirement of additional forces (to take on responsibilities of hinterland security (including VAs/VPs), keeping lines of

communication green, certain defensive tasks etc) to provide IA the flexibility of inter-theatre movement and employment, during war. The CAPFs over the last few decades, have been substantially empowered, both in numbers and resources, resulting in considerable enhancement of capabilities, to not only execute their primary tasks but also shoulder mandated war time responsibilities efficiently. With so much of effort, time and resources having been invested towards this endeavour, promoting a greater cohesion and synergy between the two forces is therefore no longer a choice, but an imperative. There already exists a fair amount of complementarity in the organization, structures, weapons and equipment between the IA and CAPFs; the need of the hour, is to scale up operational interoperability, primarily by harmonized training and optimized resource utilization. This onerous task will however not be easy and require careful planning and preparation and more importantly a will to execute. Gen Upendra Dwivedi, COAS while speaking during Chanakya Defence Dialogue 2024 aptly stated, “*war does not start the day you start fighting, it starts the day you start planning*”. We therefore require to plan for this integration on priority, to ensure that we are prepared for any contingency. It is well accepted that contemporary challenges will require an integrated ‘Whole of Nation’ approach; integrating the CAPFs with the IA will be a major step in this direction.

DISCLAIMER

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Endnotes

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