JASJIT SINGH MEMORIAL LECTURE

S JAISHANKAR

It is a great privilege to be invited to deliver the Air Cmde Jasjit Singh Memorial Lecture this year. All of us here would have known of him, and some would have worked with him. This is an occasion to reflect on the contribution of a somewhat unusual soldier-scholar, who helped shape the strategic thinking of our times. Debating contemporary challenges in that sphere with his openness of mind would be the best tribute to Air Cmde Jasjit.

My own association with Jasjit was both official and personal. I first knew of him through Air Mshl Vir Narain when we were both together in Moscow. Thereafter, he was a visitor at my father's home, where I also resided at that time. Once he joined the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)—which for me was a second family—our acquaintance got much closer. But I really got to know him well when I was posted in Washington, DC and he was sent as part of a government campaign to discourage the United States from supplying Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft to Pakistan. I travelled the length and breadth of the United States with him, including the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, and the Pacific Command (PACOM) headquarters in Hawaii. The IDSA culture that my father embodied was one that focussed on the business of muscular advocacy.

This address was delivered by Mr S Jaishankar, former foreign secretary to the Government of India, as the second Jasjit Singh Memorial Lecture on July 18, 2018. The day is marked by the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) to commemorate the birthday of the late Air Cmde Jasjit Singh AVSM VrC VM, founder director of CAPS and a foremost strategic thinker and analyst of India.

Mine, in contrast, was more one that relied on the power of persuasion. Jasjit, to my relief and even admiration, managed to bridge these two requirements very comfortably. His formidable knowledge clearly put American policy-makers dealing with the AWACS issue from 40,000 ft. at visible disadvantage. As you all know, that deal did not go through for a variety of reasons. But I can state that at a critical juncture, Jasjit helped to raise important question marks about the wisdom of the proposal.

Thereafter, as he assumed the directorship of IDSA and made his presence felt in think-tank circles, I had other occasions to interact with him and even host him in various capitals in the world. It was evident that moving out of the military domain, he was putting across with authority views on the political and strategic challenges of the day. That was an era when India-Pakistan rather than India-China relations took up most of the oxygen. The exercise of the nuclear option was another critical issue. Managing the consequences of that exercise was also important, a point that escaped the more primitive analyses on this subject. The opening to the United States after the end of the Cold War was another significant initiative that brought together realists in this country. The *Look East* policy and its security expressions were the accompanying phenomena. Jasjit was involved in all this and more. He was not only deeply respected in policy-making circles but widely consulted, especially by those who really appreciated the complexities of national security.

There are many messages from Jasjit's life. His personal courage was publicly recognised; his leadership widely noted; his knowledge and judgement greatly appreciated; and his scholarship broadly admired. But today, from his various qualities, I would like to pick a particular facet that is relevant to contemporary times. This is the issue of integration and jointness, a debate that is usually associated with the more efficient working of the armed forces. My remarks go well beyond that narrow field, as indeed did Jasjit's world view.

Integration, jointness, coordination and sharing are connected challenges of all large organisations. Allowing for some latitude in terms of the spectrum that they represent, it can be safely asserted that historically, those who have

acted in a more integrated manner have prevailed. This is the explanation for smaller forces often defeating larger ones in the battlefield. It is at the heart of organisational efficiency and the recipe for business success. In any field of human activity, ranging from politics to sports, bringing to bear the full potential at one's command makes all the difference. Tighter coordination and distinct entities working together brings out a value that is often unrealised otherwise. This is as true for the bureaucratic and corporate world as it is for the security one. Equally, lack of coordination is the bane of policy implementation. Many of you would recall that this was at the heart of the 9/11 Commission Report recommendations. Most analysis of setbacks tend to be in this space.

Yet, however obvious it may be as a conceptual proposition, the fact is that integration and coordination are extremely challenging for any large organisation. They grapple with set habits, vested interests and distinct identities. Agreeing at the headlines level rarely leads automatically to it working out operationally. Some of it may be conscious, but much of that is because history and experience pull in the opposite direction. Indeed, other than building better capabilities, breaking silos is as close as one can come to a silver bullet in the field of policy implementation. We, in India, are particularly given to operating with sub-optimal coordination. Our history is replete with examples that came at great cost to the country. Some of that arises from our extreme individualism. It could be aggravated by a possessiveness which has been enhanced by shortages. Bureaucratism has always been entrenched in our society. What perhaps adds to all of this is a focus on processes rather than concern over outcomes.

None of this is particularly new and I'm sure that aspects of this problem have occurred to each of you in your particular workplace context. Within the government, an important step that was taken to address the national security dimension of this challenge was the creation of the institution of the National Security Advisor (NSA) and its Secretariat. In the Services, this debate is reflected in the emergence of the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC) and Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), though there are larger issues of jointness, creation of the

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or even Theatre Commands to be considered. On the civilian side, mechanisms such as inter-ministerial committees at the political and bureaucratic levels are seen as the solution. My focus today is less on institutional fixes and more on creating a culture of integration that would best serve national interests. By culture, I refer to the need to promote habits and change thinking. To my mind, there are six broad integration challenges that today would determine the quality of our policy-making and implementation. Allow me to dwell on them.

The first requirement is one that I draw from my direct professional experience in foreign policy over four decades. The fact is that even 71 years after independence, there are still significant hard security challenges facing India. Unresolved borders are the most important of them. But these challenges have been aggravated by the sustained assault that our society has faced from state-sponsored terrorism. From time to time, other attempts have been made to also undermine our national integrity and unity. This is not just the past; they continue to present challenges for the foreseeable future. The diplomacy of such a nation must be closely interlinked with its security interests and mechanisms. It is very different from that of a more secure environment where the levels of threat are considerably lower. Today, 'securitising' foreign policy is an imperative. Our diplomatic interactions have to take into account the requirements on the defence front, as well as the sensitivities of internal security. This is particularly so in the neighbourhood where there are hard security factors on which the margins for compromise are limited. In the minds of our diplomats, these considerations must be foremost. Obviously, diplomacy itself is a creative and optimistic profession. But, it should not indulge itself to a point where it is divorced from the realities on the ground. Nor can fashionable debating points become the basis for serious policy.

One realisation that struck me while reviewing our diplomacy vis-à-vis China just prior to the 1962 conflict was of how much importance was being given to working with that country on global issues and how little on the resolution of the looming differences on the boundary and Tibet. Even with Pakistan, the binary choices of engaging or not engaging on

issues of difference do not take in to account the broad spectrum of options that the security side of the business can generate. Perhaps, some of this is generational. But the Indian polity is itself maturing in the direction of more integrated policy-making. Certainly, my recent experience was of very tight working together of our foreign policy apparatus, the defence structures including the Services, our internal security and our agencies. In fact, this has been one of the areas of progress in the last few years. I saw this during the Doklam faceoff, the preparations for the 2016 surgical strikes and on other occasions. It has not only reflected in better coordination, but also more cross-fertilisation. The placement of personnel across institutions and greater degree of exchanges is also encouraging. Deepening and widening these practices would certainly help change the culture of silos in Lutyens Delhi. So too would the creation of more multi-Service training institutions.

Conversely, our defence and security agencies also need to develop a better sense of the world. There are three broad arguments which favour such an approach. One, a more globalised world has made borders less relevant and the threats more seamless. Without an adequate understanding of other polities and societies, it is difficult to accurately anticipate threats to ours. Second, just as in the economy, defence too suffers from various limitations of capabilities and balanced growth. Our near term future will be of leveraging external options while seeking to build up our domestic ones. In fact, one of the most significant contributions that Indian diplomacy has made to national security is that it has maximised our defence options abroad. There are few countries that can claim today to have the wide array of technology and capability access that we enjoy. But exercising it effectively and getting the most from that option requires a larger strategic understanding of the global landscape. There is much truth to the observation that when you buy an aircraft, you actually buy into a relationship. Third, as India goes up the ladder of power in international politics, we will have to shoulder greater responsibility abroad while getting involved beyond our borders. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) situations are an obvious example, but there are also considerations such as stability in societies vital to our interests or even the welfare of the diaspora. All of

this would require an appreciation of global trends and developments. The short point is that just as diplomats need to understand defence and security better, soldiers and security specialists have to develop a finer understanding of world politics.

The same logic also applies to the domain of trade and economics. A globalised world is necessarily a more inter-dependent and constrained one. Competition among powers is today expressed essentially through the economic medium. In fact, if one looks at the rise of China from the larger perspective of history, it stands out because that has taken place without any military conflict. China may have now built up capabilities, but its global influence derives more from trade balances, market shares, production dependence and investible surplus. That each of these factors has been used in a strategic manner is also something that Indians must understand and emulate to the extent possible. Given the steady externalisation of our own economy over the last 25 years, it is imperative that our system too approaches economic issues with a better sense of its foreign policy implications. There are tactical aspects to this domain too, among them developing the skills to close out negotiations on optimal terms. Whether it is bilateral or multilateral, engaging with other cultures and making judgements about the best terms that can be obtained requires both training and experience.

Currently, much of the foreign policy discourse revolves around concluding trade agreements: the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in its updated incarnation, the fate of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the application of bilateral tariffs and its impact on the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and other regional initiatives still under negotiation. India itself is engaged with East Asia in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations, with Europe on the Bilateral Trade and Investments Agreement (BTIA) discussions and with a number of other nations on a bilateral format. While the content is about trade, investment and services, the undeniable reality is that these are really central to our strategic positioning. Very often, the terms of an economic agreement envisage a time period that is meant to prepare our defences in terms of standards and policies. That we have used this so inadequately for domestic

preparations underlines how casually we have traditionally approached economic negotiations. Nor have we strategically exploited opportunities. Whether it is in defining the larger objectives, determining the pace of the negotiations or taking a call on the give and take of the process, the line between politics and economics starts to disappear. That understanding could perhaps give a more purposeful direction to India's efforts in this domain.

Today, trade issues are at the core of the Trump Administration's foreign policy and it is difficult to deal with them in isolation. In fact, it is India that stands to benefit from a broader consideration of the issues on the table. Similarly, with China, the enormous trade deficit has not only acquired political connotations but has serious strategic implications for India. Like other countries, we cannot be neglectful of the security repercussions of investments in sensitive areas. Connectivity is now a new area of sensitivity, but also of great opportunity. It is at the heart of credibly implementing a *Neighbourhood First* policy. At the same time, when carried out in an opaque manner without market viability, it understandably raises red flags. The strategisation of connectivity is as significant as the weaponisation of finance. For us in India, both call for coordinated multi-sectoral responses. We have the example of Hambantota in 2008 to remind us how complacency and departmental thinking created the basis for a strategic blunder.

While inter-departmental, inter-agency and inter-Service challenges are widely recognised, one that is usually neglected is the 'intra' one. Even within, organisational structures tend to be narrow and possessive, usually at the cost of efficiency. For that reason, cross-cutting laterals are tasked with compensating for this deficiency. This is actually quite a pervasive phenomenon and we have had our fair share, including in the Foreign Ministry. Usually, silos are defended in the name of tradition and entitlement. Not surprisingly, consideration of outcomes is not a factor. The truth is that any serious effort at team building has to take on this challenge. Anachronisms are difficult to justify in the face of the mounting pressures of our contemporary world. In fact, it is only when there is a real emphasis on performance that such old-fashioned thinking can be overcome.

The need for greater interpenetration between the worlds of national security and technology has been recognised more strongly. Traditionally, we have always thought of atomic energy and space as sectors that have strategic significance. In both cases, there has been a history of external collaboration and our successes in these fields have directly contributed to national capability and prestige. We are now in a very different world, one of Internet of Things (IOT) driven industry, cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence and big data. The correlation between technology and security has only got stronger. One part of the challenge is to upgrade technological capabilities; the other is to acquire and develop them with greater consciousness of their ramifications. It is revealing that at the heart of the US-China trade tensions is the American belief that China has obtained technology by unfair means. That the United States, in turn, is targeting the *Make in China 2025* programme says much for the centrality of technology to future power balances. Similarly, the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe has considerable ramifications beyond the stated objective of protecting privacy. Given that the primary mode of global competition has shifted to the economic and technological domains, it is vital for foreign and even national security policy to factor this in more centrally than is currently the case.

The fifth big area for greater coordination is between government and business. A number of factors make a compelling case for that, among them the nature of India's growth and development in the last quarter century. It stands to reason that a larger economy with a different composition and greater global influence would lead to changed stakeholdership. I recall a conversation about a decade ago with President Kalam where we were discussing the reasons for India's changing international image. While economic growth broadly and the nuclear tests specifically were factors in this regard, perhaps the most impact was made by the dotcom revolution and the Y2K scare. Out of that grew the global image of the 'techie' Indian. But in parallel, the globalisation of Indian businesses had a profound impact on the thinking of elites across the world. The problem now is no longer of image; that is reasonably well established. What is more pressing is the need to build

and deploy capabilities. If India is to be influential in its neighbourhood and in say, Africa, that will only happen if it delivers on economic projects. If its global reach and influence are to grow, it must become more relevant to the growth prospects of other nations. As stated earlier, the tectonic shifts will no longer be military, but economic and technological. In our country, all these factors require harnessing the energies of our businesses for national goals more effectively. That requires stronger conversations, deeper buy ins and greater support. In many geographies, our business connections are perhaps of longer standing and more deeply rooted than political relationships. By their very nature, they tend to be more stable and less partisan. Harmonising the interests and activities of our businesses with larger national goals is, therefore, a subject worthy of greater attention. Most other major polities have fashioned their systems to take this into account. At the end of the day, India in world politics will only be as good as its economic performance and delivery capabilities.

The last but certainly not the least of the integration challenges is that between those who make policies and others who debate and analyse them. This is a subject unto itself, but on this occasion, let me make some brief observations. I must confess that I often read descriptions of our strategic thinking which are difficult to recognise, leave alone understand. Much of that arises from the fact that policy-making and policy analysis are two distinct worlds. We do not have a system of exchanges between them and consequently, some of what is written reaches the level of the unreal. Common shortcomings are an obsession with textualism, a focus on events rather than trends, confusing tactics for strategy and being dismissive of structural realities. Partiality and prejudices also colour the picture, something that foreign observers of India find particularly difficult to grasp. To the extent there is a better understanding of the strategic direction of our policies, a grasp of risk factors and some insight into arriving at a balanced judgement, we could close the gap between policy and projection. Efforts have been made to improve the dissemination of policy thinking through greater engagement with the think-tank community. Clearly, there is great value in stepping that up.

Air Cmde Jasjit served this nation over a long period in various capacities, always excelling in his given responsibilities. He rose above the politics of the day to address longer term challenges. His ability to span different worlds made him stand out even in a competitive environment. But above all, his sense of duty and commitment to national interest were exceptional. In many ways, he was a hero, perhaps even more so for someone like me who was educated in an Air Force School.