



National Counter-terrorism Centre (NCTC): Issues and Options

1 Apr, 2013 [Dr. N Manoharan, Senior Fellow, VIF](#) [View3562](#) [Comments 0](#)

Going by the recent claims of Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde, NCTC would see the light of the day after next month's Chief Ministers. Earlier attempts to set-up an umbrella body on counter-terrorism failed mainly because of opposition from states ruled by non-Cong. A major concern was that the idea of unilateral operations by the NCTC would infringe on the states' powers and hurt the federal structure of the country. Another hurdle in the form of reservations about placing NCTC within the Intelligence Bureau (IB). These two issues have now taken out "operations part" of the NCTC and also by not locating the NCTC within the IB.

Way back in 2009, the then Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram had outlined his vision for "the broad architecture of a new security system for the country today and in the foreseeable future." His idea was to institute an umbrella body dedicated to counter terrorism on the lines of the NCTC with control over intelligence, operations and investigation of all matters pertaining to terrorism. The NCTC's goals, according to him, should include preventing a terrorist attack, containing a terrorist attack should one take place, and responding to a terrorist attack by inflicting maximum damage on perpetrators". The aim of NCTC, according to the former Home Minister Chidambaram, was to reduce the failures of existing counter-terror modules.

Even a die-hard critic would not question the need for NCTC. Response to threats should depend on their nature. Undoubtedly, India is one of the most affected countries by terrorism and, in the recent period, it has witnessed more terrorist incidents than any other country in the world. The varied forms of threats that range from militancy in Jammu & Kashmir, insurgency in the northeast of India, Left Wing Extremism in the hills, jihadi terrorism threatening the hinterland. Then there are other threats, over and above the identified main forms, such as illegal gambling, trafficking, smuggling of counterfeit currencies, small arms proliferation, organised crime and cyber warfare. All these determine the nature of terrorism confronted by India. Yet, the country lacks a single overarching body dedicated to counter terrorism. The time limit for constituting the NCTC was set as end-2010, but is yet to see the light of the day. Now, the present Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde has indicated his readiness to consider controversial proposals to break the impasse." Any new counter-terrorism body would be a failure unless it is evolved based on consensus in India.

To avoid duplication, Chidambaram wanted all related agencies involved in counter-terrorism (although they are part of different ministries) to report to the proposed NCTC (under the Ministry of Home Affairs) on terrorism. These agencies include Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), Intelligence Bureau (IB), Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO), National Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Aviation Research Centre (ARC), Multi-Agency Centre (MAC), Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), Central Intelligence Agency (CBI), National Investigation Agency (NIA) to report to the proposed NCTC (under the Ministry of Home Affairs) on terrorism. However, there is an intense resistance to this "submission". There is a pervasive fear that such an arrangement would lead to the emergence of powers in the Home Minister and the Ministry of Home Affairs emerging as "super ministry".

Although the above apprehension is farfetched, it is the responsibility of the Center to convey in unambiguous terms NCTC's focus i.e. terrorism. It should be acknowledged that intelligence/investigation/security agencies have a far wider mandate than terrorism. Even on matters of methodology of working would be cooperation and coordination and not subordination of one agency to the other. The final objective is synergy and cohesion in counter-terrorism efforts, by doing away with overlapping, duplications, bottlenecks and unnecessary hurdles. The final objective, it is enough if NCTC functions as an umbrella organisation with representations from intelligence, investigation and security agencies in a position to integrate all instruments of national power, including diplomatic, economic, social, political, military, intelligence, and security, and ensure unity of effort. It should happen at central, state and local levels. The tentacles of the NCTC should penetrate deep down upto the grassroots of being another top-heavy organisation.

It need not follow any international model – US, UK or European – but that which suits India's capabilities and threats. It has to be innovative in its approach rather than defensive and reactive. 'Prevention' and 'protection' should be the main watch words. For this, the Center should monitor terror/militant groups, their support network, sponsors, sanctuaries, mode of operation, threat potential, and leadership and risk assessments for policy makers. In this regard, it can effectively use 'Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System (CCNTS), National Crime Grid (NATGRID), Central Monitoring System (CMS) and Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). Personnel for NCTC could be picked from intelligence, investigation and security agencies headed by the senior most experienced officer on rotation basis with simple command. Turf wars could be avoided, with the potential and efficacy of the agencies maximised.

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