



HOME

Lessons from the NSG operation



Kamna Arora

It is courage, courage, courage, that raises the blood of life to crimson splendor. Live bravely and present a brave front to adversity. – Roman poet Horace

As the heroic National Security Guards (NSG) commandos were overpowering the terrorists holed up inside Taj and Trident-Oberoi hotels, and Nariman House in Mumbai, I was recalling these lines of Roman poet Horace.

Ferocious, frightening sound of explosions, and sharp bullets directed at NSG commandos failed to deter their willpower, resolve, and strength. The 'men in black' moved on without shying away from giving up their lives for the nation.

They spearheaded the 59-hour-long operation to end the siege of iconic landmarks of not just Mumbai, but entire India. As Sun Tzu, a Chinese General, military strategist, and author of 'The Art of War', underlines that the imperative idea in such operations is "victory", all eyes were on these brave heroes, who were determined to gun down terrorists and save maximum innocent lives.

▪ The official data put the death toll at 183. Around 400 NSG commandos managed to rescue almost 700-800 people despite reaching the terror sites hours after the launch of the attacks. India was facing the worst terror attack on its soil and the country's elite commando force was waiting for an airplane in New Delhi to reach the spot and get to the task of cornering terrorists. According to NSG DG Jyoti Krishan Dutt, "By the time we reached (Mumbai), most (hostages) were dead."

A number of question marks were put on the effectiveness of India's security system when the elite commando force reached the terror sites so late. In fact, the Black Cats, as NSG commandos are called, could have launched operations in the financial capital at least three hours earlier had they been alerted on time, provided a special aircraft instantly and clear roads for their swift passage.

Stationed near Gurgaon, the commandos were alerted at midnight on November 26, two and half hours after the terrorists began wreaking havoc miles away in Mumbai. Then, the commandos reached the Palam airport in an hour after loading necessary equipment, ammunition and stores in trucks. Yes, the commandos reached the airport in 'trucks' because the helicopters available with the NSG at that time lacked night-flying capabilities! Notably, the NSG does not possess a fixed-wing aircraft and its demand for one has yet to be cleared by the Home Minister.

At a time when NSG commandos were required the most, they were not sent to Mumbai in the fastest way possible. An older and slower IL-76 was called from Chandigarh airport 200 kilometers away to take the commandos to the 'war zone'. The plane, however, did not arrive in New Delhi until 2.00 am.

And when the commandos finally set their foot in Mumbai, almost 10 hours had passed since the first attack was reported.

A delay in rapid response from the NSG proved to be advantageous for terrorists, who got more time to hole themselves up in defensive positions in hotels and in Nariman House. I am sure that the result of these operations could have been different had the force been given timely orders.

However, despite all the odds, nothing could shake their determination. The elite force was ready to undertake an operation that was unusual for India. Donning their trademark dark fatigues, the commandos were also joined by heavily-armed Army para commandos and Navy's marine commando force.

While the NSG commandos' first priority was to take the guests out of the hotels and then neutralise the militants, they had not been provided with accurate floor plan of the two hotels. On the other hand, the terrorists holed up inside the luxurious buildings had sound knowledge of the buildings' design, which eventually helped them to stay a step ahead of the intense offensive launched against them.

In fact, the terrorists were equipped with sound and better technologies than the NSG. The terrorists had access to significant information apropos NSG operation through the Internet on their mobile phones, hence keeping the forces at bay for hours. On the contrary, the commandos were not provided with any wireless equipment, except their cell phones. It made the security experts realize that new hi-tech terrorists were not just using technology as defensive weapons, but also employing them to take advantage of security loopholes.

Despite all the ambiguities, the commandos managed to flush out the terrorists and win the battle and live up to the message of NSG DG, "Together we can and we will strive for *Sarvatra, Sarvottam, Suraksha*."

Before the operation in Mumbai, the NSG had suffered only two combat deaths since its inception in 1984. However, two more NSG commandos laid their lives, along with 16 police personnel, while battling terrorists holed up inside the Oberoi-Trident and Taj hotels, and an orthodox Jewish centre.

The NSG first came into being in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar as a rapid action force to combat terrorist attacks. Modelled on Britain's SAS and Germany's GSG-9, the NSG was set up in 1984 as a Federal Contingency Deployment Force to combat all forms of terrorism in India.

This is not the first time the NSG has rendered its service and helped the country get rid of unwanted terror situations. Before Mumbai, the NSG had carried out their operation in 2002 when it tackled Islamist terrorists, who took worshippers as hostage at the Akshardham temple in Gujarat.

Security experts believe that the NSG's Army wing possesses both the vigour and expertise to fight against well-trained al Qaeda-type terrorists.

Kudos to the NSG and to all the forces that assisted these elite commandos in ending the unprecedented terror attack in Mumbai. The whole country is proud of them.

The assault on Mumbai has exposed the determination of Indian leadership in international arena. It is of no use to indulge in a debate as to whether the caretakers of the nation were informed in advance of the attack. But their performance and behaviour during the operation has left the hoi polloi furious.

I wish the leaders of this country could acquire the basic qualities found in an NSG commando. I wish the leaders could be as determined in implementing policies as an NSG commando

is in saving his country. I wish the leaders could be as focused in eradicating terrorism as an NSG commando is in giving up his life in crushing all forms of terrorism. I wish the leaders could acquire the willpower as an NSG commando to take stringent and swift action while dealing with a number of issues that have rotted our system. I wish all leaders could command and guide a county as effectively as an NSG commando does in the time of an operation.

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon for India. But our security system is naive. A spate of explosions this year alone completely failed to wake our ministers up. Our despair, grief, tears and cries completely fail to awaken them. People of this country do not want resignations; they want a sound system that can ensure safety and security. More than condolences, people want assurances that tougher security measures of this country will never find themselves entrapped in the files of ministers but will be implemented.

I want ministers to work on Sun Tzu's advice, *"In peace prepare for war, in war prepare for peace. The art of war is of vital importance to the state. It is matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence under no circumstances can it be neglected."*

Please wake up. We can still change the course of the battle and win it.

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NSG Commandos, the Nation Salutes you..... However, there were some stupid mistakes in the operations..... Before helicopter dropping the Commandos, the so called Crisis management group failed to plan and think..... Some Commandos should have been sent in as Safai Karamcharis, Utility provider, or Waiter/Cooks, or even as hotel customers, or dressed like women, etc. etc..... I don't know when this Crisis Management Group will employ intelligent persons, but not already existing (Sifarshi & Bureaucratic) duffers.....I hope they learn the lessson..... **Ashok- New Delhi**

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very informative **shashank- delhi**

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We NEED military rule for minimum 5 years. Just to stregthen the clean system and remove all corrupt politicians. As well as make tough uniform law. **Kumar- Dubai**

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The above account shows that despite having the capability to fight terror, our system fails us. Very well-written, objective, thoroughly researched piece... **deepak nagpal- new delhi**

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The writer above has asked a strong question to our leadership. The fact that the NSG arrived late, the fact that ``actionable information`` given to the Navy and the coast gard by the IB was not acted upon, the media is showing these reports where the IB gave the location of the vessel close to Indian waters, and then you see admiral suresh mehta saying information available should be actionable. politicians are now wary to invoke anti - terror laws as they are worried about their vote bank. India should be just like our great soldiers and commandos strong and united. Looking at these facts it would not be bad if India had a few years of military rule. Yesterday I heard somnath chatterjee still saying that we have to keep freindship with pakistan still keep the communication lines open, RR patil said before that ``These kind of things happen in big cities``. this proves that these politicians who do not even know what is coming out from their mouths are not fit to run the country. It is our ignorance of the fact that pakistan will never be fully a peaceful neighbour still we were after 2001 Parliament attacks looking towards peaceful co-existence. bomb those terror camps in POK and take back that Kashmir as well than there should be no issue. JAI JAWAN JAI HIND. **Indian- India**

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