CHAPTER FOUR
THE NATIONAL SECURITY GUARD (NSG)

This chapter is an attempt to understand the NSG in the context of the Indian state's response to the emerging threat from terrorism. The first part of the chapter examines the factors that led to the creation of the NSG. The second part evaluates the role and functions of the Force and various legal powers and immunities available to it. The third part deals with the organisational structure of the NSG, various kinds of training imparted to the Force, and their impact on the efficiency of the Force. The fourth part analyses the performance of the NSG, with emphasis on the strengths and the weaknesses of the Force. Finally, some broad conclusions have been regarding the development and functioning of the Force.

The National Security Guard (NSG), popularly known as the Black Cat commandos, was raised in response to the growing terrorist violence in the 1980s. That decade witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in terrorist violence and India found it very difficult to cope with this kind of political violence which manifested itself in many forms armed attacks resulting in the killing of innocents, the bombing the hijacking of an aircraft, the taking of
hostages, and assassination of leaders.¹

I. Origin

Terrorism, as an act of political violence, is a part of the overall strategy of secessionist or insurgent groups to achieve their political objectives. The immediate aim of an act of terrorism, however, is to emphasise a political aim, advertise political discontent, gain widespread recognition through mass media and to create a psychological state of extreme fear totally out of proportion to the physical damage it causes.²

Although terrorism is not a new phenomenon, it has evolved into a highly developed strategy and a form of covert war in contemporary world. The international security environment has also favoured such kind of warfare. With conventional war becoming too expensive, proxy war through terrorism is a low cost option with a high rate of success. Also, it has the advantage of giving the sponsoring countries the option of denying its role.³ Such states either actively take part in terrorist activities, sponsor terrorism or


² Ved Marwah, Uncivil Wars: Pathology of Terrorism in India (New Delhi: Harper Colling, 1995), pp.4-5.

³ Ibid., p.3.
extend indirect support to terrorist organisations in the form of training, hideouts, financial, ideological and organisational support.

Revolutions in the technological fields have brought about a qualitative change in the terrorist violence. With the easy availability of sophisticated weapons and other electronic gadgets of destruction, even a small group of people can take on the mighty state and can wreck havoc in the society.

Modern terrorism has developed the capability to use the revolution in mass media to its advantage. As Karl A. Seger says,

"Every terrorist event is a media event. With the impact of television and the instant communications available to both the electronic and print media, the old Chinese saying 'kill one and frighten ten thousand' can be rewritten to read 'kill one and frighten ten million'.... Terrorism is not measured in body counts, by the numbers of wounded, or by dollar value of the damages. Terrorism is measured in terms of the column inches in newspapers and magazines and the number of minutes an event generates on television and radio. Almost every terrorist event is a media event and the media love it."

The revolution in communication has also enabled the terrorist organisations to use sophisticated communication devices to communicate with each other, to communicate with their leaders, to coordinate their activities and to enhance inter-group communication among different terrorist outfits.

---

Given the tremendous impact of terrorist violence, the Governments found it very difficult to evolve a proper strategy to deal with the highly modern, sophisticated and extremely dangerous phenomenon of contemporary terrorism. Existing law and order machinery and instruments of Force were ill-equipped to counter such threats, which required a comprehensive strategy and highly equipped and trained commando force.

Karl Seger talks about three approaches to deal with the threats from terrorism. They are: political and diplomatic approaches, strategic approaches and tactical responses. The first deal with the root cause of terrorism in a society. The strategic approach includes actions taken to prevent terrorism or a specific terrorist act from occurring. This approach is also called 'anti-terrorism'. The tactical responses to terrorism are proactive or counter-terrorism measure in the response to an actual terrorist incident. This includes, using commando force during hostage taking, hijacking or storming a terrorist hideout. Such forces were raised in different countries like the SAS in UK, DELTA in the US, GSG-9 in West Germany, GIGN in France and Shar-I-Natkal in Israel. The creation of the National Security Guard in India was, a part of the same realisation on the

---

8 Ibid., pp.32-36.
part of the Government of India to have a specialist Force to deal with the specific situations arising out of terrorist activities.

The need for such a specialised commando force was felt after "Operation Blue Star" in Punjab in 1984. This operation was carried out by the Indian Army which resulted in more than 1,000 casualties and heavy damage to the Golden Temple. The aftermath of this operation proved more costly. It gave a further boost to the separatist movement in Punjab, wounded Sikh pride and alienated the community from the national mainstream. It led to the assassination of the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. These developments convinced security experts and the political leadership of the need for a new force to deal with terrorist violence.7 Upto this point various paramilitary forces, especially the CRPF and the BSF, had been used to counter terrorism. They were trained and equipped to operate over large areas, but when it came to deal with pin-point targets they were found to be lacking both in terms of training and weapons. Further, the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the preparation of a hit list by various Sikh militant organisations brought to the fore the entire question of VIP security.

After Operation Blue Star, the then Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, Mr. R.N. Kao, suggested that a special security

7 Ibid., p.176.
'district' be created in the VIP area of Delhi. He also proposed the creation of a task force to take over the main security task from the Delhi Police. Until then, a Joint Director of the Intelligence Bureau had been in-charge of the Prime Minister's security which heavily relied on the Delhi Police. The guidelines laid down in the 'Blue Book' about the Prime Minister's security went back to British days and related to the protection of Viceroy. After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the Special Frontier Force, an elite army formation dealing with special security tasks in the border areas, was temporarily entrusted with the protection of Rajiv Gandhi pending creation of a new organisation. In short, the changing security scenario in the country necessitated the formation of a new security force. The National Security Guard (NSG) was formed in 1984. Young and highly-trained persons from the army, CRPF, BSF, ITBP and State police organisations were deputed to serve in the NSG. Earlier, a study group set up by the Union government studied commando forces in other countries to deal with counter terrorism and anti-hijack operations. They made several suggestions which were incorporated in the NSG. The creation of the National Security Guard was a significant step in enhancing security measures in India.

---


Guard was formalised by the NSG Act 1986, which was presented in the Lok Sabha by the Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ghulam Nabi Azad. He introduced a Bill “to provide for the constitution and regulation of an armed force of the Union for combating terrorist activities with a view to protect States against internal disturbances and for matters connected therewith.”

Replying to members’ apprehensions on why a new force was needed when so many forces were already fighting terrorism, Azad said, “that NSG will be the first force of the country specially trained to fight terrorism.” He pointed out that none of the existing forces was equipped and trained to fight terrorism. B.B. Raiyan, member of Parliament, worried that setting up of a new force implied that existing forces such as the CRPF, BSF and ITBP were not able to fight terrorism. He expressed his doubt about new force being able to fight terrorism. He thought that existing forces should have been properly equipped instead.

Intervening in the Parliamentary debate, another member, Syed Sahabuddin, pointed out that “the formation of the NSG shows that the government emphasises variety rather than efficiency.... No case

---

11 Ibid., p.307.
12 Ibid., p.326.
has been made why this new force is needed.”

He pointed out that there are already a number of forces fighting terrorism. He further noted “the formation of a new force should clearly spell out as to in what way an action against a terrorist is different from what the CRPF have been trained for. Also, it should be clear whether it is going to be the guard of security of state or individual. Is it an individual oriented force or situation oriented?”

The Minister of State for Internal Security, Arun Nehru, noted that “the NSG would be an elite commando force, trained for very specialised jobs and efforts would be made to keep the NSG as elite as possible and orient it towards meeting with situations not faced by the normal police force. Therefore, the personnel were being recruited from the army and were being given very specialised training. They were being trained to meet situations arising out of any possible hijacking of aircraft.” Azad later added that this was the reason why the Bill included the clause that the force might be used outside the territory of India too.

13 Ibid., p.343.
14 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
Indrajit Gupta of the Communist Party of India (CPI) raised several questions regarding possible misuse of the NSG by the Union government. He said,

"The minister has specifically said that this is to be especially an anti-terrorist force and that we had no force of this kind existing so far. That means basically this force is being conceived of as something which is different from the CRPF, BSF and that type of paramilitary force which is already existing. Now in the statement of Objects and Reason as well as in the Preamble, there is mention not only about the need of combating terrorism and terrorist activities but also about protecting the states against internal disturbances which are not necessarily terrorist activities. It can mean many things."\(^{17}\)

Gupta also expressed apprehensions about the NSG and whether it would be deployed in the States with their consent or not.

Allaying his apprehensions, Nehru pointed out that the NSG would be deployed in the States like any other paramilitary forces within the framework of the Constitution.\(^{18}\) Azad clarified that the NSG would not be used to deal with any internal disturbance not related to terrorism. Anyway, the Force would not be large enough to be used for any purpose other than the threat posed by terrorism.

The Bill had no provision for enrolment, recruitment or any kind of intelligence. Nehru made it clear that about ninety percent of the Force would be drawn from army and paramilitary units. Some

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p.31.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
would be taken from the police. The recruitment and composition of the force were to be kept flexible in view of the likely change in terrorist situations. Regarding intelligence capabilities, Nehru said that there was no intention of adding an intelligence wing to the NSG. This would only result in duplication of work. Instead, the NSG would coordinate with the Central and State intelligence agencies.19

The NSG Bill also included conditions of service of the members of the Force. It gave the government the power to restrict and abrogate some of the Fundamental Rights of the members to maintain discipline.

II. Role

The NSG is one of the armed forces of the Union under Item II, List I of Schedule VII of the Constitution. The primary role of the NSG, as enshrined in the Preamble of the NSG Act 1986, is combating terrorist activities with a view to protecting states against internal disturbances and matters connected therewith.20

Under the Constitution of India, maintenance of public order is primarily the responsibility of respective States. If any State requests

19 Ibid.
the Centre to provide assistance in maintenance of public order, the Central government may provide assistance in the form of armed forces to the States concerned. Thus the NSG, under the existing constitutional framework, can be deployed by the Central government only at the request of the concerned States. Since the NSG is a force specially equipped and trained to deal with specific situations, it is deployed only in exceptional cases. The Force is not designed to supplant the function of the State police forces and other paramilitary forces of the Union of India.

The main tasks of the NSG are neutralisation of specific terrorist threats in any given area or point by engaging the terrorist with swift action. Another task is to handle hijack situations by storming the aircraft. Apart from this, the NSG provides security to high risk VIPs. It has also created an information centre/research and documentation wing to amass information on various terrorist groups, their strategies, weapons and tactics. The NSG also trains personnel from various State police and paramilitary organisation to deal with anti-terrorist operations, VIP security, and bomb detection and disposal. Lastly, it maintains continuous liaison with various institutions in the country dealing with anti-terrorist training.\(^21\)

\(^21\) H. Bhishampal, n.4, p.177.
While carrying out their assigned roles, the members of the NSG enjoy almost the same legal powers, immunity and protection as are available to other armed forces of the Union. Section 129 to 132 of the Criminal Procedure Code deal with the powers of the police and the armed forces to disperse unlawful assemblies or such assemblies which are likely to disturb the public peace. In exercise of this power, the armed forces usually follow the principle of minimum use of force with prior warning. However, the NSG operates in a situation where there is little scope for error because the operation is either a success or a failure. In performance of its duties what it usually confronts is not the agitating public or an unlawful assembly but highly motivated, equipped and trained terrorists. So invariably NSG personnel use firearms without any prior warning to preempt any possible retaliation. If they follow the principle of prior warning the entire purpose of commando operations gets defeated. Apparently, this practice cannot be justified legally, but it becomes necessary because the prime motive behind any commando operation is to deactivate terrorists as swiftly as possible to prevent any casualty to the hostages or to the NSG personnel.

The scope for misuse of this legal power is restricted as long as the NSG is deployed for a very short duration and with a specific purpose. But if the Central government decides to diversify the role of the NSG, like other paramilitary forces, and use the force in
situations when it has to deal with the common public, this will create problems. The NSG Act gives ample scope for such a diversification because it says that the NSG is for combating terrorist activities with a view to protecting States against internal disturbances and for matters connected therewith. Here the word "internal disturbance" is open to interpretation. In the discharge of their duties, NSG personnel have been given certain legal immunities. Section 132 of the Cr. P. C. says that no prosecution shall be instituted in any criminal court against any personnel of the armed forces of the Union without prior sanction of the Central government. Section 45 of the Cr. P. C. says that no member of the armed forces of the Union shall be arrested for anything done or purported to be done in discharge of his official duties except after obtaining the consent of the Central government. Further, section 197 (2) of the Cr. P. C., notes that no court shall take cognizance of any offense alleged to have been committed by the armed forces of the Union while acting in the discharge of their official duties except with the previous sanction of the Central government.

The NSG Act (1986) also gives certain immunities to its members. Section 138 (c) of the NSG Act says that "Notwithstanding

---


23 Ibid.
anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, any
legal proceeding (whether civil or criminal) which may lawfully be
brought against any member of the Security Guard for anything done
or intended to be done under powers conferred by, or in pursuance
of, any provision of this act or the rules, shall be commenced within
three months after the act complained of was committed and not
otherwise and notice in writing of such proceeding and of the cause
thereof shall be given to the defendant or his superior officer at least
one month before commencement of such proceeding.”

III. Organisation

The NSG is a small, specialised force. Its personnel are not
directly recruited. They are from the army and various paramilitary
forces like the CRPF, BSF and ITBP, who join the NSG on deputation.
Fifty seven percent of its personnel are from the army while the
remaining forty three percent are from different paramilitary forces.
Apart from the main striking force, the NSG has several other
components, like the technical and administrative units, intelligence
wing, bomb disposal squad, dog squad and a training centre. The
Ministry of Home Affairs is in overall charge of the Force, and all
policy related decisions are taken there. The NSG’s headquarters are

24 The National Security Guard Act, n.20, p.1147.
25 H. Bhishampal, n.6, p.175.
located in Delhi. The overall administrative and operational command is vested in a Director General who is an officer from the Indian Police Service. He is assisted by a Directorate. The NSG Directorate has two components: Administration and Operations each under an officer of the rank of Inspector General. The Inspector General (Administration) is an IPS officer who coordinates with the Ministry on matters related to the functioning of the NSG. Under him, there are five Deputy Inspectors General (DIGs) who assist the Inspector General in various areas - probation, communication, engineering, logistics and intelligence, respectively. The DIGs are from the Indian Police Service. There are five Group Commanders to assist the DIGs in their respective matters.

The Inspector General (Operations) is in overall incharge of operational matters. He is an officer of the rank of the Major General of the Army. He is assisted by a DIG (Operations) who is a Brigadier from the army. The combat element of the NSG is called 'Force' under a Force Commander who is a Brigadier from the army. Each 'Force' comprises of Special Action Groups (SAG) and Special Ranger Group (SRG) along with necessary support and administrative elements. Force headquarters have been raised to operationally command and control upto two SAGs and three SRGs. Its main role is to operationally command, train and administer all units. Each group consists of four squadrons and is under the command of a Deputy
Commandant who is generally a colonel from the army. The four squadrons are Alpha, Beta, Charlie and Headquarters squadrons. Each squadron comprises four teams each being under the command of an Assistant Commandant. The teams consist of five Heats. The Heat is the smallest unit of the NSG. Each Heat consists of five personnel, one Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) and four combatised tradesmen. That way around four hundred personnel, come under one Group.

Different Components of the Force

The Force consists of following key elements: the Special Action Group (SAG), the Special Rangers Group (SRG), the Technical Support Group (TSG), the Electronic Support Group (ESG), the Communication Group (CG) and the DOG units. The first component of the NSG that I will deal with in the Special Action Group (SAG). It is mostly drawn from the army, the Special Action Group is an elite commando force trained and equipped for swift and offensive action. Its role is to handle all facets of counter-terrorism. Counter-terrorism is the response to an actual terrorist event, anti-hijack operation, rescue of hostages and neutralisation of armed confrontation by offensive commando action. The NSG has 51 SAG which is trained and equipped to carry out rescue of hostages or
other offensive counter terrorism duties while 52 SAG is trained and equipped for counter hijack operation.\textsuperscript{25}

Special Ranger Groups are mostly drawn from various paramilitary forces, SRGs are equipped and trained to carry out anti-terrorist operations. Anti-terrorist operations are measures taken to prevent terrorism or a specific terrorist act from occurring. It is a preventive measure that includes close protection and mobile security duties of threatened VIPs of Z plus category risks.\textsuperscript{27} The SRG also provides intimate support to the SAG in its counterterrorists tasks which include interdiction of area by laying road blocks to seal all entry/exit points and to impose movement restrictions in affected areas, to provide inner cordon during counterterrorist operations, to take over and temporarily hold areas cleared by the SAG, and to conduct anti-terrorist operations in support of the SAG tasks.

The role of the Technical Support Group is to collect information pertaining to terrorists at the operational site with the help of photographic, video and audio equipment and then to speedily collate, analyse and disseminate the intelligence to all concerned. Since the success of NSG operations depends to a great extent on the accuracy of information related to the intentions and weapons of the

\textsuperscript{25} H. Bhishampal, n.6, p.178.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
terrorists, acquisition of this information necessitates the use of state-of-the-art equipment. The role of the Electronic Support Group is to provide static and operational communication support to the NSG headquarters.

The role of the Communication Group is to provide countrywide communication support to various elements of the NSG in their operational employment. Keeping urban terrorism in view, the NSG has developed a very good Bomb Disposal Squad. This is equipped with the latest equipment of bomb detection and disposal equipment. Its task is to carry out anti-sabotage checks of building, vehicles and aircraft in connection with its own operations, to assist SAG during special missions and to handle bomb incidents and bomb threats situations in aid of civil authorities on specific request. It is to be noted that Bomb Disposal Squad of the Army usually do not have much experience in dealing with Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) or the types of bomb used by the terrorists. This is the gap which has been filled by NSG.28

The role of the Dog Unit is to provide ‘Sniffer Dogs’ support to the Bomb Disposal Unit. Also, it renders valuable help in anti-sabotage checks, vehicle searches at road blocks with SAG and SRG

and anti-hijack operations with SAG.

Training

The task of the NSG is very specialised and involves high risks. It is a "zero error" force. Therefore, great emphasis has been laid on a high state of training and motivation. The nature of operations that are to be conducted demand that all personnel of the Force are extremely physically fit, perfect in shooting skills, have the requisite technical skills and are highly motivated, aggressive and mentally alert at all times. It is vital that the Force retains these high standard. To achieve this objective NSG selects personnel from the Army and various paramilitary forces. These personnel are further screened for their psychological and physical fitness. Those found unsuitable are weeded out at the end of the training. Generally younger people, below 25 years of age, are preferred for commando training. The officers are somewhat older. However, men over 25 years of age are not generally recruited. The training centre of NSG is located at Manesar camp near Gurgaon. It is headed by a training Commandant who is a Major General. He is assisted by a Deputy Commandant who is a Brigadier. The role of the training centre is to conduct reorientation, advanced, and refresher training of all units of the NSG and of any other Union or State forces. The entire training
structure of NSG can be divided into two groups: initial training and specialised training.

A minimum of twelve weeks initial training is a must for all personnel. This training is imparted in two phases: basic training and advanced training.

Basic training is for 10 weeks which covers physical conditioning, martial and close combat training, obstacle course training for physical conditioning and building up confidence, weapon training and target practice, use of communication equipment, and the use of explosives.

Advance training equips the NSG personnel to develop techniques to storm the aircraft or building, accurate firing from a long range speed driving through tough physical training.\(^9\)

Specialised training is imparted keeping in view the various tasks of the SAG and the SRG. In addition, it was decided to use the spare training capacity of the training centres to train personnel from the other paramilitaries, State Police and Army. The NSG training centre conducts three types of courses for police personnel, i.e., police commando, personnel security officers and bomb

---

\(^9\) Interview with a former NSG Personnel, at New Delhi in October 1998.
personnel.30

The NSG has 51 SAG trained to carry out counterterrorist operation while 52 SAG is trained and equipped for counter hijack operations. For both types of operations, the commandos have to face terrorists at close quarters. Thus, they are equipped with automatic Huckler Koch MP-5 sub-machine guns and semi-automatic 9 mm FN Browning pistols suitable in close quarter battles. Since the commandos have to be crackshots, they get 15 times more firing practice than Army or BSF men.31 Their firing ranges have been made highly realistic, with snapping and moving targets to simulate real conditions. Since counter hijacking operations require aircraft intervention skills, the NSG has got a full scale model of a jet airliner. This is used to train men in storming the plane and releasing the hostages with minimum casualties. Counterterrorist operations in urban areas requires building intervention skills. Two types of training are imparted in this regard. The first is slithering, rappelling and abseilling from helicopter and storming building through various means including the use of explosives to blow open the doors and windows of houses. The force is also trained in bus intervention and train intervention skills.

30 H. Bhishampal, n.6, p.180.
31 Anjali Nirmal, n.28, p.205.
To carry out counterterrorist tasks at very short notice and to ensure that the force is operationally ready, a system has been evolved whereby one squadron is always ready for operations. Another squadron is placed on training, while the third squadron is on leave and other routine duties. Thus, at any given time two squadrons of the force are available to be used for any counterterrorist task.32

IV. Performance

Counter-terrorism is the main task of the NSG which is carried out by 51 SAG assisted by Special Ranger Groups. Unlike routine operations, tactics in commando type operations requires high elements of surprise, swiftness, accuracy and proper coordination among various agencies.

The most successful counterterrorist operations carried out by the NSG was Operation Black Thunder I and II, (BT I and II) to flush out terrorists from the Golden Temple in April 1986 and May 1988, respectively. Unlike Operation Blue Star, which was done in a conventional manner by the Indian army employing maximum firepower, Operation Black Thunder was a tactical, psychological operation of low key with great success. Operation BT I was a swift operation in which approximately 80 officers, 180 trained

---

32 H. Bhishampal, n.6, p.180.
commandos and 1500 other personnel participated. The Temple was cleared and handed over to the Punjab Police. One hundred and twenty two terrorists surrendered. BT II was a relatively long operation which relied on psychological pressure. Thirty terrorists were killed and 2171 surrendered.\(^3\) The remarkable success of Operation Black Thunder II established that the NSG Commandos are invincible if they are used properly in a well planned and well coordinated operation. The objective of the Government of India was very clear: to flush out terrorists from the Golden Temple without causing any damage to the shrine and avoiding casualties. This objective was achieved by a painstaking long-term planning by the agencies involved which resulted in the near perfect coordination of different government agencies. The NSG prepared for the Operation for three months and undertook several mock operations. The Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi took personal interest and was involved in the planning and execution of operation.\(^4\)

Between 5 September 1987 and 15 January 1988, the NSG carried out ‘Operation Steeple Chase’ to capture and detain a high risk terrorist code-named ‘Jack’. On 20 January 1988, the NSG

---


\(^4\) Ibid.
commandos, in a swift heliborn operation in the Mand area of Rajasthan, raided the terrorist hideout in which two terrorists were killed. In the Tarn Taran district of Punjab, an operation was carried out to flush out terrorists holed up inside a house. Two terrorists were killed and 2 AK-47 rifles were recovered in this operation conducted in January 1999. The NSG commandos also rendered valuable assistance to the Special Investigation Team (SIT) which was investigating the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, in the form of search and strike mission. The NSG commandos were also deployed at Ayodhya during Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute. The operation was codenamed Operation Sudarshan.\textsuperscript{35} The NSG Commandos were deployed in plain clothes to avoid detection. But the Central Forces were not used in Ayodhya because the Uttar Pradesh government took a political decision not to use force. At the Central level also there was no clear cut approach how to deal with the situation especially when lakhs of people were present in Ayodhya. Lack of political initiative and clear cut approach resulted in non use of Central forces including the NSG which caused the demolition of Babri Mosque.\textsuperscript{36} During the Hazratbal Shrine crisis in Kashmir in

\textsuperscript{35} H. Bhishampal, n.6, pp.177-80.

\textsuperscript{36} For an authentic description of how the Central government approached Ayodhya problem, see Madhav Godbole, \textit{Unfinished Innings: Recollections and Reflections of a Civil Servant} (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1976).
October-November 1993, a task force of twenty officers, twenty assistant commandants and 176 commandos were moved to Srinagar to flush out terrorists from the Shrine. However, the operation was called off later because the government did not want to storm the shrine for fear of political repercussions. The agreement was reached with the militants and they were given safe passage.

52 Special Action Group is earmarked and trained in counter hijack tasks. Along with 52 Bomb Disposal Squad, 52 Dog unit, 52 SAG is based at Palam. The anti-hijack operation is a very delicate one because the lives of hundred of passengers and crew members are at stake. Generally, the hijackers are highly motivated and trained people with a link to some international terrorist organisation or to domestic dissent. Any miscalculation or mistake can prove to be disastrous.

The Government of India has an elaborate contingency plan to deal with the crisis arising out of the hijack of a plane. The plan was formulated in 1987 which was later revised in 1995 in the light of the experience gained in four incidents of hijacking that occurred in the first part of 1993. The contingency plan lays down three tier structure to deal with the hijacking. Right on top is the Crisis Management Group (CMG) headed by the Cabinet Secretary to

37 H. Bhishampal, n.6, p.179.
deliberate on the problems arising out of the contingency such as involvement of other countries, negotiations involving other countries, deployment of commandos and terms and strategy of negotiation. The CMG lays down broad guidelines of policy matters for the Central Committee (CC)\textsuperscript{38} the second tier of the structure. The CC is headed by the Director General of Civil Aviation and is responsible for dealing with the contingency of hijacking and is empowered to deal with the situation in all respect and take appropriate decision on its own.\textsuperscript{39} The third tier of the contingency plan is the Aerodrome Committee set up at various airports and is chaired by the Divisional Commissioner of that district. The Aerodrome Committee is expected to follow the direction from the CC. However, if a situation is of extremely urgent nature which does not permit adequate time to result the CC, the Aerodrome Committee can handle the situation in the best possible manner.\textsuperscript{40}

The role of the NSG in any hijack situation starts when the CMG feels that the commando action is required. According to the anti-hijacking drill laid down in the NSG manual, a crack team of fifty commandos and special aircraft IL76 are always kept ready in New


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p.202.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p.203.
Delhi to tackle emergency of this kind. The Commandos are in a position to take off within thirty minutes of being informed of the crisis.

Even this system does not work to perfection all the time and in an emergency like hijacking, when even a small delay on the part of any agency can prove to be counterproductive and the country may have to pay the cost. This happened when an Indian Airlines plane, IC814, carrying 189 persons including eleven crew members was hijacked on 24 December 1989 when it was on its way to Delhi from Kathmandu. Almost at every level, the agencies responsible for dealing with the crisis delayed in responding to the situation. Also, there was lack of coordination among various agencies. First, the CMG met only at 6 p.m. in the evening more than an hour of the crisis. The decision to deploy commandos were given at 6.10 p.m. However, the NSG aircraft left the Indira Gandhi International Airport only at 8.04 p.m. when the hijacked plane had already taken off from Amritsar and landed at Lahore.\(^{41}\) The reason for the delay was that the designated government negotiators remained untraceable. Even the NSG failed to utilise the crucial hours to put its team together. Secondly, there was a lack of coordination among the CMG, the CC and the Aerodrome Committee. Under the

\(^{41}\) Ibid.
contingency plan, the CMG is supposed to set broad guidelines for the CC that coordinates with the Aerodrome Committee. In the case of IC 814, the Aerodrome Committee continued receiving confusing guidelines on how to stop the aircraft at Amritsar. In a highly centralised system of decision making they waited for guidelines even for small decisions. Therefore, they could not stop the aircraft and Amritsar and the Commando operation could not be launched.

The most successful anti-hijack operation conducted by the NSG was 'Operation Ashwamedh' at Amritsar airport on 25 April 1993. It was a well coordinated a meticulously planned operation. The lone hijacker H.M. Hizbi alias Muhammad Yusuf Shah alias Syed Ibne-Aseer wanted to take the plane to first Kabul and then Lahore. The commando operation lasted barely for fifteen second after the commandos stormed the plane and killed the hijacker. Another successful anti-hijack operation was Operation Dum Dum conducted at Calcutta airport in November 1990 to rescue the hostages on the Airbus taken over by Burmese students.

Commenting on the role of the NSG in the government's counter-terrorist policy, K.P.S. Gill says, "The two successful operations by the NSG were conducted under my command. Operation Black Thunder and anti-hijack operation in April 1993 when NSG commandos stormed the aircraft and shot dead the
terrorist. Unfortunately, the NSG's major handicap is that it cannot take independent decision. In both the cases the NSG commandos waited for orders from me before they moved in. There is no leadership, neither are they equipped to play an important role. Our biggest tragedy is that even today there is no authoritative response group to deal with situations like this.42

Therefore, we find that the performance of the NSG was successful in cases where there were clear cut guidelines, proper coordination among different agencies and the deployment was at a pinpoint target. These are the kind of tasks which the NSG has been trained and prepared for. The NSG has been trained for close encounter fights and to work in a small group with great swiftness.

On the other hand deployment of the NSG for a long duration or in a large area often failed to produce the desired results.43 For example, towards the end of 1989, two companies of the Force were dispatched to Punjab. In August 1989 the NSG carried out Operation Mouse Trap in Tarn Taran district of Punjab in conjunction with the Punjab Police. Both these operations were not successful. The failure was due to fact that the NSG was not familiar with the terrain, had no

42 Vrinda Gopinath, "The Hijackers are Now Cracking Up", The Indian Express (New Delhi), 26 December 1999.

intelligence backup and was looked upon as alien by both the people and the Punjab Police. It had a demoralising effect on the NSG and shattered the myth that the NSG was invincible. The deployment was done on ad hoc basis and is a misutilisation of the Force. In explaining the government's use of the NSG, Subodh Kant Sahay, the then Minister of State for Home Affairs, noted, "It is all a question of manpower. There is an acute shortage of police personnel in Punjab and therefore, we decided to send NSG."\textsuperscript{46}

Such ad hoc approaches and misutilisation or underutilisation of the NSG is not in the interest of the Force, and it betrays the very purpose for which it was created. Fortunately, the strength of the NSG has been kept low, and its deployment entails massive logistics support and planning. Therefore, the government is not tempted to use it for other purposes except for VIP security, otherwise the Force would have wracked up more failures, performing roles for which they are not trained and prepared.

VIP Security

The NSG, of late, has come to be identified with VIP security, though that is not its main role. The practice was started as a

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
temporary arrangement in view of the increasing attempts on the lives of VIPs by terrorists.

Normally, VIP protection duties are assigned to the local police or commandos from the paramilitary forces, particularly from the ITBP, depending on the nature of threat. The assessment of threats to VIPs is done by the Ministry of Home Affairs, which prepares a priority list of persons who are to be given different kinds of security "cover". The persons under the Z plus category are protected by the NSG. This is a highly sensitive role which requires extreme levels of physical fitness, sharp reflexes, presence of mind and willingness to protect the VIP even at the risk of one's own life. Personnel from the Special Rangers Group are deployed for VIP security which involves close protection and mobile security. The security of VIP residences is not the task of the NSG. Normally, one security liaisoning officer, one junior commissioned officer and 6 commandos are attached to one VIP. The task of the security liaisoning officer is to make a prior visit to a site where the VIP is scheduled to visit and coordinate with other security agencies. The junior commissioned officer and commandos accompany the VIP while he/she is on the move or attending social gathering. During elections this task becomes more

46 Interview with a former NSG personnel in October 1998.
difficult because of the extensive traveling of VIP.\textsuperscript{47}

There is a general impression that the NSG is being misutilised in the name of VIP security. The NSG security cover has become a status symbol. If a person gets the NSG cover, he/she wants to maintain it more or less permanently irrespective of the change in threat perception. Any attempt by the government to withdraw the NSG cover is resisted and since VIPs invariably are high profile political persons, they succeed in retaining the NSG cover. In 1996, the Ministry of Home Affairs changed the priority lists of persons under Z plus security risk category. Several people who were taken off the list were later put back on due to political pressure.\textsuperscript{48} At present there are 19 persons under the security cover of the NSG, including most prominently L.K.Advani, Prafulla Kumar Mohanta, Prakash Singh Badal, Farooq Abdullah, Mayawati and Mulayam Singh Yadav. Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs has decided to drastically scale down the security cover enjoyed by many VIP for whom it has become a status symbol. Underlining the government's policy on VIP security, Union Home Secretary, Kamal Pande, said that "Security cover will be provided only to those who genuinely face threats from militants because of their position of action taken while in

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{48} Bhaashyam Kasturi, "Redefining Security to Avoid Chaos", The Financial Express (New Delhi), 18 August 1996.
government and due to any public stand taken by them against terrorism.\footnote{49}

Another problem stems from the plethora of agencies involved in VIP security (the MHA, the Central and State police force, Intelligence Bureau). One agency assesses the threat, another provides security at VIP residences, yet another provides mobile security, and yet another provides security at the site where the VIP is scheduled to visit. This creates enormous problems of coordination. Any lapse could result in tragedy. One such lapse resulted in the assassination of Beant Singh, the Chief Minister of Punjab who was in the hit-list of various pro-Khalistan militant groups. The Chief Minister was killed in a powerful bomb explosion when he was stepping into his car at the Punjab and Haryana Civil Secretariat in Chandigarh. At that time he was ringed by the NSG commandos.

Beant Singh's security was provided by over 150 personnel drawn from the NSG, the CRPF, the Punjab Armed Police and the State Police Commandos.\footnote{60} But there were serious problems of coordination and accountability. The NSG provides only mobile

\footnote{49} The Times of India (New Delhi) 8 February 2000.

security: that is, from one safe place to another safe place.\textsuperscript{61} The security of other places like the residence or the office of the VIP is the responsibility of other agencies. There was inadequate security arrangement at the VIP parking plot which enabled the assassins to drive their car near the VIP parking lot.\textsuperscript{62} Secondly, the vehicles on which the VIP travels does not always remain in the possession of the NSG. The cars were at the disposal of the drivers hence exposed to the risk of sabotage. The security drill requires that three similar bullet-proof cars bearing identical number plates should be there to avoid detection of the exact car in which the VIP travels. On the fateful day three cars in Beant's cavalcade had different number plates. This enabled the assassin to position himself near the car.\textsuperscript{63}

This shows that the NSG's performance in VIP security is limited by various factors. This when viewed against the fact that the VIP security is not the NSG's prime role and the Force is not trained for it indicate that the deployment of the NSG on VIP security is unnecessary diversion which may affect the morale, training and performance of this elite Force. Due to its overuse in VIP security, most of the SRG manpower is not available for intimate support to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{61} Interview, n.46.
\textsuperscript{62} Ramesh Vinayak, n.49, p.49.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}

234
the SAG, in case of counterterrorist operations. The solution lies in providing suitable training to local police to deal with different aspects of VIP security. A separate wing could be created for this purpose.

V. Conclusion

The NSG is an elite commando force. Its role starts when a certain act of terrorism assumes serious proportions and other security agencies like the State Police and paramilitary forces are not able to deal with it. It is a situation specific force, trained and equipped to be deployed in extreme cases, for swift, aggressive commando action. It is not meant for supplanting the role of other security forces. We have seen that the NSG achieved good success in various roles assigned to it. Also, there has been no great diversification in the role of the NSG compared to other paramilitary forces. A Force like the NSG is indispensable in view of the growing terrorist violence in different forms. In future, the dependence on the NSG is likely to increase if a long term comprehensive policy against terrorism is not formulated and implemented by the government.