

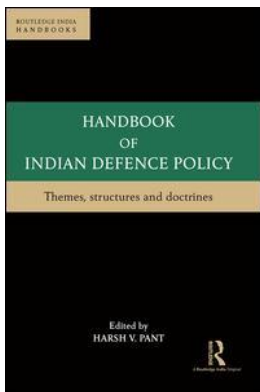
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## **Handbook of Indian Defence Policy Themes, structures and doctrines**

Harsh V. Pant

### **Indian civil–military relations**

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# Indian civil–military relations

## An overview

*Ayesha Ray*

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This chapter presents a thematic overview of Indian civil–military relations over more than six decades by examining key debates and controversies between India’s political leadership and its military.

In the years following independence, India’s political leadership offered its military a minimal role in policymaking. Specifically, under Nehru’s leadership, advancing a socialist–economic system gained primacy over military growth and all matters, defence. In witnessing, first-hand, the ascendancy to military rule in Pakistan, Indian civilians tempered their responses to giving too much power to its own military (Pant 2008).<sup>1</sup> Several important features characterised the developing relationship between civilians and the military in post-independence India that remain at the heart of understanding civil–military relations even today. An institutional system, abolishing the position of commander-in-chief of the Indian military, was created, giving the Ministry of Defence tight bureaucratic control over the three services, which were kept separate from it. This would, of course, shape future Indian defence policy in sclerotic ways (discussed later in this chapter). The Indian Army was constituted along ethnolinguistic and caste lines and many of the principles of British professionalism and doctrinal innovation were absorbed as military policy (Cohen and Dasgupta 2010).<sup>2</sup> India’s higher defence management developed a noticeably hierarchical organisation where a body called the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs occupied the topmost tier. It included senior ministers from the prime minister’s cabinet exercising chief responsibility over defence and foreign affairs. The Defence Planning Committee came next, consisting of the cabinet secretary; the prime minister’s special secretary; the secretaries of planning, defence, finance, external affairs; and the three service chiefs. The Chief of Staff Committee (CSC) formed the third tier, representing the three services (Cohen and Dasgupta 2010).<sup>3</sup> This hierarchical arrangement in higher defence has often obfuscated the need for clear goals of policy implementation,

frequently producing discord and tensions in Indian civil–military relations. Conflicting objectives in political and military goals have presented themselves in a wide variety of contexts from fighting external wars, countering internal secessionism, developing nuclear doctrines, organising strategic culture and instituting defence reform (Ray 2013a).<sup>4</sup> The next few sections address these issues separately.

## External wars

India fought four wars with Pakistan (1947, 1965, 1971 and 1999) and one with China (1962), with each war monumentally shaping the contours of its foreign policy and military strategy. When armed tribesmen from Pakistan invaded Kashmir in October 1947, the Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh, requested assistance from the government of India, which was provided on the condition that Hari Singh sign an Instrument of Accession, handing over the state's powers of defence, communication and foreign affairs to the central government. To confirm the accession, both countries agreed on a referendum once hostilities ceased. The war ended on 1 January 1949 through a UN-brokered ceasefire urging both countries to honour their commitment to holding a referendum in the state. A ceasefire line was established, where the two sides stopped fighting and a UN peacekeeping force was established. The referendum, however, has never been held, and the debate over the legitimacy of Kashmir rages on. In 1954, Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India was ratified by the state's constituent assembly. In 1957, it approved its own constitution – one that is quite similar in content to the Indian Constitution. Since then, India considers that part of the state an integral part of its nation, and while it administers two-thirds of the state, one-third is controlled by Pakistan. A small region, called Azad (Free) Jammu and Kashmir, which the Indians call 'Pakistan-occupied Kashmir', is semi-autonomous. The larger area, which includes the former kingdoms of Hunza and Nagar, also called the northern areas, is directly administered by Pakistan (Ganguly 2002 ; Schofield 2010).<sup>5</sup>

In 1965, India was drawn into a second war with Pakistan, when Pakistani soldiers launched a covert operation across the ceasefire line into Indian-administered Kashmir. Both states also shared conflicting claims over the Rann of Kutch. On 4 September 1965, UN Security Council Resolution 209 called for a ceasefire urging the two governments to cooperate fully with UNMOGIP in observing the ceasefire. On 20 September, after hostilities spilled over to the international border between India and West Pakistan, the Council adopted Resolution 211 (1965), demanding the enforcement of a ceasefire to take effect at 07:00 hours GMT on 22 September 1965 and called for the subsequent withdrawal of all armed personnel to positions held before 5 August. Owing to intervention by the United States and the Soviet Union, both India's and Pakistan's prime ministers met at Tashkent and agreed to withdraw all armed personnel from both sides to positions held prior to the outbreak of war and observe the terms of the ceasefire (UN Report 2014).<sup>6</sup>

In 1971, a popular uprising in an eastern province of Bangladesh brought ordinary citizens together demanding freedom, democracy and human rights (Bose 2011).<sup>7</sup> In response to the electoral victory of the Awami League in East Pakistan, the Pakistani Army unleashed genocidal violence against its Bengali population, and a variety of circumstances, again, compelled India to intervene. The war defeated Pakistan's forces, creating a separate nation called Bangladesh along India's eastern border. Pakistan continually refuses to accept the army's culpability in the disaster, blaming it instead on Indian duplicity and lack of US support. In reference to Pakistan's position, Timothy Hoyt notes, 'the absence of national self-reflection and re-assessment suggests an inability to adapt to policy failure' (Hoyt 2011).<sup>8</sup>

Once India became a declared nuclear weapons power in 1998, it found itself cornered into another war with Pakistan. In 1999, dressed in civilian attire, Pakistani soldiers occupied a number of strategic posts on the Indian side of the Line of Control. On detecting the intrusion, between May and July 1999, Indian soldiers pushed back Pakistani forces in a series of small battles. Hostilities ended when Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif travelled to Washington responding to President Clinton's calls for a ceasefire on 4 July (Basrur, Cohen and Wilson 2007).<sup>9</sup> The implications of the Kargil conflict for nuclear deterrence and democratic peace were striking, ushering in a new phase of military modernisation and doctrinal innovation. The conflict also energised a debate on the role of third parties in bilateral conflicts, particularly since the United States had played a pivotal role in pressuring the Pakistani government in negotiating a peace deal (Krishna and Chari 2001).<sup>10</sup> At the end of the war, a report called the Kargil Review Committee Report tabled a number of recommendations advocating changes in military strategy and proposed a fresh new set of institutional responses in the presence of nuclear weapons (Swami 2000).<sup>11</sup> The 2001–02 attack on the Indian Parliament further re-energised the debate on preparing for a limited war with Pakistan.

With regard to its northern neighbour, India's relations with China marked a turning point in 1962, with the outbreak of war between the two countries. China launched a military offensive, completely taking New Delhi by surprise. The end of the conflict fostered debate on Defence Minister Krishna Menon's utter incompetence and neglect in heeding timely warnings from senior military officials (Sorabjee 2014).<sup>12</sup> Earlier in 2014, parts of the Henderson–Brooks Report were declassified, placing considerable onus on Nehru for India's humiliating defeat in the 1962 war by forcing the country to engage in an unwinnable war.<sup>13</sup> The report discusses how the Indian military was allegedly ordered to engage the Chinese military in a war they were bound to lose.<sup>14</sup> The report, authored by Lieutenant General Henderson Brooks and Brigadier P.S. Bhagat, then commandant of the Indian Military Academy, was commissioned by Lieutenant General J. N Chaudhuri, who became chief of army staff in 1962. While China's conventional military superiority remains a significant priority for Indian security experts, Pakistan's downward spiral into instability has posed a much more immediate threat to Indian security interests in the subcontinent. The rapid proliferation of militant groups, growing internal sectarian conflict and the increasing influence of

the Tehreek-e-Taliban provide enormous challenges to India in working with an unstable neighbour.<sup>15</sup>

### Internal unrest and resistance

Since India's independence, the military offered its assistance to civilians as 'aid to civil power' in the maintenance of law and order. With a complete breakdown in administrative machinery, the Indian Army acted as the only reliable agency that could restore law and order. Since then, decisions to involve the army in aid to civil operations remain a political decision, with the Indian Army continuing to maintain a conspicuous presence in assisting civilians during times of war and natural calamities. Over time, however, changes in the nature of India's external and internal threats expanded the Indian military's role to embrace counter-insurgency operations. Yet, the challenges to developing a coherent counter-insurgency doctrine presented itself in a multitude of contexts. In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the Indian Army was fighting Mizo rebels in the north-east, Sikh rebels in Punjab, Kashmiri separatists in Jammu and Kashmir and Tamil guerrillas in Sri Lanka into the late 1980s. During the Naga insurgency, the army and civil administration had little to no experience in such situations. Local unrest slowly spread to other parts, soon affecting large swathes of the north-east. Slow to grasp the nature of insurgency, the political leadership failed to develop a coherent policy that often seemed fractured between using military force and appeasing the local populations (Sinha 2011).<sup>16</sup> Borrowing from the British experience in Malaya, in both Nagaland and Mizoram, the Indian Army tried isolating entire populations from rebel groups. In Nagaland, there was severe opposition to this policy while the Mizoram case produced mixed results (Sinha 2011). In yet another case, a violent insurgent movement in Punjab gained momentum in the mid-1980s. Led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, this movement developed a violence-centred strategy to foster communal unrest within the state. The Dal Khalsa intended to force Hindus out of Punjab and create a backlash that could unite the Sikh community in building a new homeland. Growing evidence of Bhindranwale's support to militant activities, however, did not persuade the Congress party to take immediate corrective measures. Motivated by political considerations and the need to build votes, the Congress party, in a glaring lack of judgement, appeased Bhindranwale's agenda. On June 5, 1984, the military launched an operation code-named Operation Blue Star to evict Sikh militants who had seized control of the Golden Temple, the holy shrine of the Sikhs in Amritsar, Punjab. In the ensuing bloody campaign, the Indian Army successfully destroyed the Sikh militant base. Subsequently, Punjab was placed under military rule (Brar 2003).<sup>17</sup>

In a third, and perhaps what continues to be one of the most challenging cases effectively draining the army of men, material and resources, the Indian military is engaged in crushing a separatist movement in Kashmir from the 1990s. Between 1983 and 1987, growing disillusionment with the politics of the state government provoked unrest against the local state. In 1986, the state's National Conference (NC)

party, widely accused of corruption, struck a deal with the Indian Congress party. At the same time, a new party called the Muslim United Front (MUF) was poised to win the 1987 state elections. This party attracted a large number of Kashmiri groups, including pro-independence activists, disenchanted Kashmiri youth and the pro-Pakistan Jama'at-I Islami. However, state elections in 1987 were deliberately rigged, leading to the electoral victory of the NC party. Following the NC's victory, hundreds of MUF leaders were arrested. After the elections, militants belonging to the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) mounted major attacks on the state government and resorted to the bombings of government buildings and transportation. Using this as an opportune moment to engage India in a proxy war, Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) began supporting the secessionist movement by providing a huge supply of arms and foreign mercenaries to disaffected Kashmiri youth (Ganguly 1996; Joshi 1997).<sup>18</sup> Violence spread across the state, with the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Border Security Force (BSF) failing to bring the situation under control. In 1989, New Delhi turned to the Indian Army for assistance to help local agencies fight insurgents and maintain law and order.

The Indian Army's role in fighting Kashmiri insurgents gradually expanded in the early 1990s and an elite army unit called the Rashtriya Rifles was specifically created to manage counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir. In 1995, the Special Task Force (STF) and Special Operations Group (SOG) were also created from within the J&K Police to further assist the Rashtriya Rifles in counter-insurgency operations. In the last two decades, however, the Indian military has been unable to disengage itself from Kashmir. Moreover, under the controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), the military exercised its power with impunity, often arresting, detaining and killing suspected civilians in fake encounters. Extrajudicial executions and disappearances became frequent, eroding the professionalism of military units and spawning further outrage among disenchanted Kashmiri youth. It also drew the world's attention to a series of human rights abuses, bringing disrepute to the government and the Indian Army. Caught between offering protection to Kashmiri civilians against a powerful militant movement and facing rising unrest to a perceived occupation, the morale of the Indian armed forces suffered a serious blow (Ahmad 2006).<sup>19</sup> From a professional war-fighting force, the Indian Army was gradually transforming itself into a police force. Today, much of the debate on counter-insurgency in India seeks to address reduction in troop levels of the Indian military in Kashmir. Emulating American counter-insurgency efforts, India is also attempting to combine a set of different counter-insurgency techniques, which include providing both development and assistance to disaffected local populations to win their support.

One case where India undertook counter-insurgency operations on foreign soil is Sri Lanka. When the Sinhalese government clamped down on political freedom and rights of Indian Tamil minorities, opposition to government rule emerged, giving rise to a Tamil separatist movement. An aggressive militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), gained a stronghold in the

Jaffna Peninsula, resorting to violent attacks against Sri Lankan defence forces. Fighting between the Sri Lankan Army and militant groups continued for several years with Sri Lankan forces launching a massive offensive against the LTTE in the summer of 1987. Military gains made by the Sri Lankan Army in the Jaffna Peninsula began to steadily influence India's security environment. Concerned about the future of Tamil minorities in Sri Lanka, India's political leaders empathised with the Tamils as the Indian state of Tamil Nadu had a significantly large Tamil population. Consequently, New Delhi decided to extend its political support to Tamil minority representative groups. In the first phase of the anti-militant campaign (1983–87), India's political leadership attempted to mediate between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil separatists. But in what would turn into one of the most perilous blunders in Indian foreign policy, Indian political leaders allowed Tamil separatists a safe haven to the extent of supporting the operation of dozens of training camps for Tamil guerrillas in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu (Hagerty 1991).<sup>20</sup> On 29 July 1987, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Colombo; leaders of both countries signed the Indo–Sri Lankan Accord, which required India to send an 'Indian Peace Keeping Force' (IPKF) to the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka. However, the Indian Army soon found itself at the receiving end of a violent backlash from radical Sinhalese nationals. A series of military clashes between the IPKF and the LTTE broke out, derailing the peace process. Consequently, in 1989, New Delhi decided to withdraw the IPKF forces from Sri Lanka. By March 1990, most of the Indian soldiers had returned back to India despite continued fighting in Sri Lanka (Kodikara 1989).<sup>21</sup>

A more recent challenge facing the Indian military is a strongly entrenched Maoist insurrection that threatens to destabilise the internal security of the country. The Maoists, a group of communist guerrillas, emerged in 1967 as a popular peasant revolution against exploitative landlords. Popularly known as the Naxalite movement, the group has gained significant leverage against the Indian state since 2004, turning itself into a violent resistance movement, the result of poorly implemented state policies and lack of development (Pandita 2011; Misra and Pandita 2012).<sup>22</sup> The Maoists are mostly active in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Telengana. In 1987, an elite commando unit called the 'Greyhounds' was raised in Andhra Pradesh to conduct offensive operations against the Maoists. From a force of 9,300 in 2004, their numbers have grown steadily, with current estimates at 40,000 permanent members and 100,000 militia (Chopra 2010).<sup>23</sup> In a major counter-offensive in 2009, the Indian military launched Operation Green Hunt (a 100,000-troop strong counter-offensive) to fight the guerrillas. In May 2013, in one of the most vicious campaigns executed by Maoist guerrillas, a Congress party convoy in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh was ambushed, unravelling years of government efforts to reduce their influence. Twenty-seven people, including much of the Congress leadership in Chhattisgarh, were killed in the attack and another 32 injured. State Congress Party Chief, Nandakumar Patel, his son and Mahendra Karma, a former state minister and leader of the official opposition in the Chattisgarh state legislature were also killed. The Maoist

movement is unusual from India's other counter-insurgency campaigns due to the tactical advantage enjoyed by Maoist guerrillas over Indian security forces. The Maoists have successfully orchestrated sophisticated large-scale operations using IEDs, attacked training centres and police stations to capture weaponry, attacked jails to break out captured comrades and targeted judges and state functionaries to weaken state presence. The Maoists also enjoy access to funding by operating an extortion network that accrues as much as INR 14 billion (\$300 million).<sup>24</sup> The challenge for the Indian government and security forces now is to fight the guerrillas without alienating the local population, which is facing intimidation from many within the ranks of these groups. However, without adequate attention to the social problems of the people living in these areas, continued emphasis on conventional military techniques or the use of brute force places the military at a further disadvantage in effectively fighting the Maoists.

### **Doctrine and strategy in a nuclear state**

Influencing India's posture on external and internal security threats is its developing nuclear capability. India's rise to nuclear power status emerged in the background of its 1974 and 1998 tests. The first nuclear test in 1974 was conducted for peaceful purposes while the second introduced India as a declared nuclear weapons state to the world. Since then, India's nuclear doctrine has undergone various permutations and combinations and much of the drive for developing a doctrine on nuclear strategy has been a consequence of important debates between India's military and political leadership that began in the 1970s. India's nuclear doctrine is built on the doctrine of no-first use and the creation of a triad of nuclear forces. In the words of former foreign secretary and the current chairman of India's National Security Advisory Board, Shyam Saran, 'India will not be the first to use nuclear weapons, but if it is attacked with such weapons, it would engage in nuclear retaliation which will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage on its adversary'.

Experts argue that India's nuclear doctrine is determined by a variety of considerations. On the external front, the need to maintain a minimum credible nuclear deterrent that keeps India's geopolitical realities with Pakistan and China in place is vital. Pakistan's constant need to compete with India's conventional military superiority, its failure to prosecute the perpetrators of the 1998 Mumbai attacks, the almost constant state of political instability within its borders, the rise of Islamist fundamentalism and covert support to militancy in Kashmir shall continue to shape India's future nuclear posture. Most experts agree the presence of nuclear weapons will inevitably influence the possibility of future conflict between the two countries. In two starkly different strategic environments that both countries find themselves in, instability at the nuclear level could provoke instability at lower levels of conflict, but as long as the conflict stays limited, the possibility of escalation to the nuclear threshold remains low. However, if the war graduates from a limited conflict to a full-scale conventional war, then escalation to the nuclear level



could become increasingly possible (Kapur 2005).<sup>25</sup> China, an advanced nuclear state, also has current capabilities, which include the DF-25 missile that can deliver single or multiple nuclear and conventional warheads to a range of 3,200 km. Along with China's border encroachments in 2013, this development is considered a significant threat to India's external security (Sidhu 2014).<sup>26</sup>

With the presence of nuclear weapons, the conduct of external and internal wars then requires an understanding of the mechanisms of doctrine and strategy. India's doctrinal and strategic goals often appear to lack clarity, but a number of doctrinal and organisational innovations in recent years suggest that such changes are being undertaken to maintain the professional character of the Indian military. A team of generals led by former chief of Army Staff, General V.K. Singh (when he was Eastern Army Commander) suggested a series of radical steps to bring about a paradigm shift in the way the Indian Army is deployed and operationalised, both offensively and defensively. Such changes primarily seek to build the army's capacity for fighting a war on 'two and a half fronts' – engaging both Pakistan and China simultaneously while managing internal unrest. The failure of the Sundarji doctrine in the 1980s prompted India to devise a new strategy, popularly known as 'Cold Start'. Here, defensive corps close to the border with Pakistan were redesignated as 'pivot' corps. The 2008 Mumbai attack further compelled civilians to create a new doctrine that could rapidly mobilise itself for limited conventional strikes on the Pakistani side of the border, immediately following a terrorist attack. These pivot corps were given enhanced offensive elements within integrated battle groups that consist of division-sized forces comprising armour, artillery and aviation assets designed to swiftly hit Pakistan before the strike corps – located deeper inside India – can mobilise. Cold Start seeks to place battle groups in action in less than 48 hours (Ladwig 2007–08 Gokhale 2011).<sup>27</sup> The underlying rationale is 'to arm Delhi with the ability to retaliate against Islamabad without sparking a full-fledged nuclear exchange' (Keck 2013).<sup>28</sup> But unlike Pakistan, where the military watches every civilian move, civilians in India have little faith in entrusting nuclear weapons to their military and are cautious in allowing the military control over a doctrine that could possibly spiral out of control during a crisis. Separately, the Indian Army is working on the formation of a mountain strike corps, which can be deployed closer to India's vast mountainous border with China, adjacent to its northern and eastern borders. This concern is mostly a response to China's tacit aggressive manoeuvres along the Arunachal Pradesh border, the latest of which is the release of a new map claiming Arunachal Pradesh as part of Chinese territory (Gokhale 2011).<sup>29</sup> There is also a greater push within the Indian military for the creation of joint doctrines that could improve the effectiveness of the Indian armed forces. In a 2013 lecture, N.N. Vohra, USI defence secretary and home secretary during the P.V. Narsimha Rao Government (1991–96), pointed to the need of establishing meaningful cohesiveness and developing joint doctrines that cover all aspects of integrated operations, critical in an emergency, to help the military deliver a timely response (Vohra 2013).<sup>30</sup>

## Defence reforms

Aside debates on doctrine and strategy, the discussion on defence reforms in India has typically emerged in the context of wars or crises, which were followed by the establishment of various committees responsible for future recommendations. However, defence reforms in India remain a divisive issue, characterised by bureaucratic red tape, secrecy and lack of coordination between the Ministry of Defence and the three services. At the end of the Kargil war, when the Kargil Review Committee Report suggested a complete reappraisal of the state of Indian defence reforms, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee constituted a group of ministers to review India's national security system and implement the recommendations of the committee (Mukherjee 2010).<sup>31</sup> The Task Force on defence was led by Arun Singh, but the recommendations of this committee still remain declassified. Most deliberations of the Task Force proposed the immediate creation of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) to head the Integrated Defence Staff, the creation of a tri-services command at Andaman and Nicobar (ANC) and the Strategic Forces Command (SFC) (Mukherjee 2010). The Arun Singh Committee also recommended the integration of the service headquarters with the Ministry of Defence. While some of the recommendations were implemented, the more immediate and crucial ones, such as the creation of the CDS, continue to remain less of a priority. In 2010, the Naresh Chandra Committee formulated another set of recommendations urging quick and effective defence reform. Again, according to sources, there has been little to no consensus on the creation of the post of Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee – a post that would have reduced the differences between the three services on issues of planning, procurement, doctrine and operations. Amidst such constant setbacks, the Ministry of Defence blames the three services for disagreements over various aspects of the Committee's recommendations (Pandit 2013; Sarin 2014).<sup>32</sup>

A clear lack of coordination between various agencies in higher defence management obviously makes defence preparedness a serious issue. Can the Indian armed forces effectively defend the country during an external attack? Does the Indian military possess cutting-edge technology both in weapons and design to execute successful operations on the battlefield? Regrettably, the answers to such questions are not very encouraging. In 2012, former chief of the Indian Army, General V.K. Singh, created a firestorm when, in a letter addressed to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, he expressed anguish over the dire state of India's defence preparedness. General V.K. Singh wrote: 'the state of the major fighting arms i.e. mechanized forces, artillery, air defense, infantry and special-forces, as well as engineers and signals, is indeed alarming. The army's entire tank fleet is devoid of critical ammunition to defeat enemy tanks while the elite forces are woefully short of essential weapons' (Gokhale 2014).<sup>33</sup> It appears the Indian Navy, too, is miserably short of conventional submarines and those in production in Indian shipyards are at least four years behind schedule. The Indian Air Force (IAF) is down to 33 squadrons of fighter jets instead of the required 39 squadrons (Gokhale 2014). For General Bikram Singh, upgrading the small arms industry is a priority. But the military is

far from acquiring the 5.56mm close quarter battle (CQB) carbines or the multi-calibre assault rifles he promised the army's 359 infantry units and over 100 Special Forces and counter-insurgency battalions, including the Rashtriya Rifles and Assam Rifles (Bedi 2014).<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, paramilitary and special commando units of the respective state police forces will employ either or both weapon systems in what will possibly be one of the world's largest small arms programme worth \$7–\$8 billion. But until the 2016–17 deadline to acquire assault rifles arrives, the army will have to work without carbines that are integral to infantry operations. It will also have to manage with inefficient INSAS assault rifles, another indispensable small arm in battlefield operations.

Bureaucratic inertia, unwieldy procedures and a weak set of defence ministers have obviously resulted in an equally weak system of defence management (Gokhale 2014). In arms procurement and defence equipment, India faces a multitude of challenges, from 'obsolete artillery and air defence systems; a rigid attitude to military doctrine and inter-service cooperation; a navy whose only aircraft carrier is creaking towards retirement after more than five decades in British and Indian service; and two neighbours – China and Pakistan – which seem to have a much better record of getting a better return on their defence investments' (Hardy 2013). But despite such recurring problems, political avenues for growth abound. The IAF is looking to break a deal with the French to buy 126 Rafale medium multi-role combat aircraft (Gokhale 2014). And in the event the MMRCA deal does not consolidate, India is looking to procure 50 more Sukhoi-30 MKI jets from Russia (Hardy 2013).<sup>35</sup> Yet, the modernisation processes underway in the army, air force and navy on doctrine and force posture is likely to face significant domestic constraints. As Ashley Tellis explains, India's defence procurement 'enjoys a minimal relationship to strategic objectives, with most procurement being ad-hoc', and 'vendor-adversarial', ironically increasing the corruption it so badly wants to avoid (Tellis and Thyagaraj 2013).<sup>36</sup>

### Inter-service rivalry and discord

Adding another layer to the complex nature of Indian civil–military relations, is the frequency with which it is held hostage to discord and disagreement between the armed forces and civilians, and between the three services. Over the years, the Indian armed forces have demonstrated a growing sense of unease and frustration with the Ministry of Defence not only for its excessive bureaucratic interference, but an utter neglect and lack of commitment to important military matters. More specifically, the Indian armed forces are deeply critical of the overlap between political and bureaucratic control. This growing frustration recently became evident in an open and very public battle between former chief of staff, General V.K. Singh, and the government over a tenure issue that ultimately pushed the general to take his own government to court. In a letter to the prime minister, which was leaked to the media, General V.K. Singh expressed concern over the unpreparedness of the armed forces, a dysfunctional air force and the use of old equipment. But civilian distrust of the military is not uncommon either. The

political leadership continues to use lessons from Pakistan's militarisation as a deterrent to creating and maintaining a strong military. Mutual suspicion and lack of coordination, therefore, is increasingly making Indian civil–military relations appear disjointed, unstructured, and at times, highly unprofessional. In a separate case, a routine military drill in January 2012 that intended to test the flexibility of Indian Army units in fog conditions disclosed a high degree of distrust between the military and civilian leaders. Two units of the Indian Army advancing towards New Delhi as part of the drill immediately received orders to return back to their bases after civilians raised a high alert since the military had conducted this exercise without following the required protocol of informing the Ministry of Defence (Cheney 2012; Hardley and Kumar 2012).<sup>37</sup>

Outside the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces battle zone, bitter and acrimonious debates are also common within the three services. Turf wars over who should or should not exercise control over the sharing of critical assets and weapons, acquisitions, military policy and other war and peacetime issues are lamentably common. During the Kargil conflict, then army chief, General V.P. Malik, and IAF chief, A.Y. Tipnis, fought bitterly on key operational issues, such as 'deployment of reconnaissance planes, fighters and helicopters with the purpose of evicting troops from dominating heights'.<sup>38</sup> Though Malik, in his 2006 book, denied any rivalry with his IAF counterpart, the former army chief said the conflict had 'highlighted the operational urgency for handing over armed forces and attack helicopter assets to the Army'. The Comptroller and Auditor General and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on defence also highlighted 'lack of coordination' between the navy and the Indian Coast Guard, making the Indian coast vulnerable to external threats. Such constant divisiveness is steadily eroding the operational readiness of the forces. Former defence minister A.K. Antony alluded to this problem in 2013, stating that while the aviation wing of the army could go ahead with its own acquisition plans, purchasing new helicopters, there should be 'perfect synergy' between the army and IAF because of the crying need for 'synergy and pooling in of efforts and resources' (Ray 2013b).<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

What, then, are some of the broad conclusions that can be drawn with reference to the existing nature of Indian civil–military relations? While civilian control of the military in India remains complete and the Indian military continues to function as a professional army, Indian civil–military relations present a rather complex picture. First, military strategy and doctrinal innovation often find themselves in conflict with political objectives. Repeated inconsistencies in political and military objectives during periods of brief crises or wars make a smooth implementation of political and military strategy much more challenging. The resulting friction in matching military strategy to political goals gives Indian civil–military relations a complex and misjudged character. India's regular border skirmishes with Pakistan demonstrates the need for clearly articulated military objectives. Indian military

responses, therefore, need to be calibrated in a way that take into account the success of India's long-term political and military objectives.

Second, in addition to preparing against external threats, the Indian military faces the additional burden of being involved in fighting internal security challenges, such as the Maoist insurrection. This additional responsibility places a severe burden on its capacity to work like a professional war-fighting force. Whether it is unabated militancy in Kashmir, casualties inflicted by Maoists on government personnel, or the response to disaster management, the Indian military is facing the severe strain of poor resources, inadequate manpower and scarce equipment in meeting these challenges. Since 2013, the United States has been particularly interested in working with India to learn from its counter-insurgency efforts. Despite significant differences in their respective political and military strategies to address challenges presented by unconventional and irregular warfare, India could benefit from some of the lessons of US counter-insurgency policy. India, however, should be careful to not embrace counter-insurgency (COIN) as a model for its own doctrinal development since contextual and ideological differences guiding both doctrines may only complicate victories on the ground.

Third, the bureaucracy's role as an intermediate agency between the political leadership and the military is severely impeding direct civil–military communication. It is also allowing a growing sense of alienation and disappointment within a military that is no longer shy of expressing public disapproval of civilian policy, especially on issues of defence procurement and defence reorganisation. The general apathy and inattention of the Ministry of Defence in the timely creation of institutional organisations that can effectively manage nuclear doctrine and military strategy is drawing a deeper wedge in Indian civil–military relations. In order to facilitate greater synergy in Indian civil–military relations, India's system of higher defence management, therefore, is in dire need of a complete re-haul.

Fourth, given the unpredictable nature of Pakistan's internal politics, its unstable governance structure and the very real threat posed by Islamist fundamentalists to India's external security, Indian civil–military responses towards Pakistan require a serious debate on reorganising doctrinal and strategic goals. Does India need to develop a combination of offensive and defensive doctrines? Does India's nuclear arsenal need a more robust structure to effectively act as a deterrent or will its nuclear doctrine impact Pakistani responses in minimal ways? Many such issues concerning doctrinal innovation are still in their infancy, but it is imperative that doctrine and strategy match both military and political goals as clearly as possible. The vast expansion in terror networks also requires serious consideration and careful examination. Groups such as the Jaish-e-Mohammad (with Hafiz Saeed's open declarations of jihad) continue to present India with a formidable threat, particularly in Kashmir. Pakistan also continues to bleed India in its proxy war, resorting to repeated instances of unprovoked ceasefire violations. In 2013 alone, Pakistan violated the ceasefire 96 times. Moreover, the rise of Al-Qaeda's South Asia unit, along with its links to ISIS, is likely to pose serious risks to counter-terrorism efforts in India. Maintaining sophisticated reconnaissance and surveillance missions that can

be jointly conducted by the three services of the Indian military in coordination with security agencies must be made an immediate priority.

Finally, the nature of Indian civil–military relations and the way it evolves has significant implications for democratic governance. India’s political leadership has always been wary of designating too much decision-making power to the military in order to keep the armed forces under democratic control. However, India’s political leadership must strike the right balance in working to develop a modernised military with enough weight in defence policy while setting clear political goals without compromising the external and internal security interests of the country.

## Notes

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- 3 *Ibid.*, p.5.
- 4 For an understanding of how external wars, insurgency, and nuclear weapons have shifted the balance in civil–military functions, see, Ayesha Ray, *The Soldier and the State in India: Nuclear Weapons, Counterinsurgency, and the Transformation of Indian Civil–Military Relations* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013).
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- 11 Praveen Swami, *The Kargil War* (New Delhi: Leftword Publishers, 2000).
- 12 Soli Sorabjee, ‘Indo–China War: The Truth Must Be Out’, *Indian Express*, 23 March 2014.
- 13 The text of the report can be downloaded from the Indian Defense Review website, ‘The Henderson Brooks Report by Neville Maxwell’, *Indian Defence Review*, 18 March 2014, <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/the-henderson-brooks-report-is-out-by-neville-maxwell/> (accessed 19 March 2014).

- 14 'Secret Report on India–China War in 1962 Made Public', *Times of India*, 18 March 2014.
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- 17 For commentary on Operation Blue Star, see Lieutenant General K.S. Brar, *Operation Blue Star: The True Story* (New Delhi: Sangam Books, 2003).
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