
Civil-Military Relations in The Present Context

P K Chakravorty

Current Perspective

India is a vibrant plural democracy. The Indian armed forces were inherited from the British on attaining independence. The Indian soldier who forms a part of the three Services has been involved in combat right from the formation of the nation, The Indian soldier has always followed the motto stated by Field Marshal Philip Chetwode which states that the honour, safety and welfare of the country comes first always, and every time, the honour, safety and welfare of the men you command comes next; and your own comforts come last, always and every time.¹ Whatever be the situation, the soldiers of the three Services have placed service before self and served the nation, its elected representatives and the nation with humility, courage and fortitude. The soldiers have always risen to the occasion and enabled the nation to grow as the world's biggest and most vibrant democracy. At the current juncture, the Indian armed forces are professional and can execute operations with military profession.

At the outset, it must be clarified that civilian control is thought to be necessary for effective democratic governance. It is the principle of civilian control that differentiates democracies from authoritarian states. The military performs the dual role of making policy and fighting wars in authoritarian states. However, in democracies, there is a clear demarcation

Major General (Dr) **P K Chakravorty** (Retd) is a Senior Fellow at CLAWS.

of civilian and military roles and functions.²

A large amount of literature exists on the subject but very little work that has been done on the changing balance between civil-military relations over time.³ Stephen Cohen's analysis in his book on the Indian Army explains why India's political establishment has never been challenged by the military, while neighbouring countries like Pakistan have frequently been under military rule.⁴ This was due to the Indian Army's high degree of professionalism which, as per the author, was due to years of indoctrination, selection and training. Further, civilians in India strengthened their own positions through the use of the Indian Constitution and high levels of party control. The mechanisms used by civilians to exercise tight control over the military as well as the training imparted to the military made the military completely subordinate to them. Of course, post 1960, there has been issues when both sides have politely expressed their points of view.⁵

Military Professionalism, Expertise and Core Issues in the Civil-Military Divide

In a democracy where civilian control exists, there can be two kinds of relationship between the civil authority and the military. In the first case, there is a clear division where the military understands the civilian authority over decision-making and the civilian authority understands the military's autonomy in its own sphere of functioning. The second could be where the division is blurred and there is a marked absence of agreement between civilians and the military on the precise nature of their functions. Samuel Huntington has addressed these issues objectively. He focusses on two issues: military professionalism and expertise, whereas another writer, Peter Feaver, focusses on the issue of military disobedience.⁶ Civilian control, as per Huntington exists when there is a subordination of an autonomous profession to the ends of policy.⁷ His definition implies two issues: the first is that civilians make policy and all policies

are implemented by other institutions that remain subordinate to civilian policies. The second aspect pertains to the armed forces, in which even if civilians respect the military as an autonomous institution with expertise on issues of strategy, the final decision on military strategy remains the prerogative of the civilians.⁸

It is also stated there are two types of civilian control: objective control and subjective control. Objective control exists where there is a clear separation between civilian and military functions. On the contrary, in subjective control, civilians feel the necessity of exercising greater control over military affairs or the military influence on civilian policy formulation. The next question is: what is military professionalism? Huntington argues that the degree of professionalism exercised by any military is determined by its function of being a war-fighting force and nothing more. Once the military begins to take on different roles such as aiding civilians in military operations or maintaining law and order, then it begins to gradually lose its professional character as its employment takes it beyond strategy and fighting wars. In our case, the Indian armed forces are committed on counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) as also in the northeastern states. Further, a numerous occasions, the armed forces have been called to maintain law and order as also for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). Consequently, the Indian government policy is influenced by the military's decision in such matters.

As regards military expertise, it pertains to the ability of the military to execute its tasks with military precision without civilian interference. Prior to the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the strategic and tactical interference by the Defence Minister was used to exercise tight control over the armed forces. To signal their dissatisfaction, numerous issues were raised during that period.⁹ The end of the war saw the emergence of a new dynamics in the civil-military relationship. The next war took place with Pakistan in 1965 and the political leadership led by Prime Minister Lal Bahadur

Shastri ceded most of the decision-making to the military.¹⁰ The victories in 1965 and 1971 as also the Kargil conflict of 1999 witnessed greater military expertise being ceded by the civilian authority. The surgical strikes launched against Pakistan in 2016, as also the 73-days standoff against China in Doklam saw greater synergy between the civil and military in the field of military operations.

India's Higher Defence Organisation: Need for Military Representation in Decision-Making

Post independence, Lord Ismay, Secretary of the Defence Committee of the British Cabinet and Chief of Staff to Winston Churchill was asked for his suggestions on setting up a structure for India's defence organisation. Based on the experiences gained during partition, he formed separate committees for the civil and military.¹¹ The final stage of evolution of the higher defence organisation occurred as a result of the nuclear tests in 1998 and the Kargil Review Committee set up after the India-Pakistan Kargil conflict in 1999. The Kargil Review Committee was followed by the Group of Ministers (GoM) which made several recommendations regarding the higher defence organisation. A large number of them have been implemented. The Strategic Forces Command, comprising the Strategic Forces has been formed and is functional. In terms of appointments related to security, the National Security Adviser (NSA) has been appointed. Apart from the National Security Council, the National Security Council Secretariat, National Technical Research Organisation, Strategic Policy Group, National Information Board, National Security Advisory Board and the latest Defence Planning Committee have been constituted. All these, except the Defence Planning Committee, formed in April 2018, mainly comprise civilian officials. The military has very few officials in these committees.¹² All these organisations are subordinate to the supreme body which is the Cabinet Committee on Security which comprises the Prime Minister, Home Minister, External Affairs Minister,

Finance Minister and Defence Minister. This is the supreme body and has no military representation.

The Group of Ministers set up in April 2000 to examine the recommendations of the Review Committee insisted that a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) be appointed who would be the single point adviser to the government on all military matters. The issue is still hanging fire and can only be resolved by a political decision. In the interim, to ensure a higher degree of jointness amongst the Services and to attempt inter-Service and intra-Service prioritisation, the government set up the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQIDS), headed by the Chief of Integrated Staff to Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC) to support the Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Chairman. There a definite need of the CDS for undertaking joint operations as also to advise the Ministry of Defence on issues pertaining to defence. At present, the Ministry of Defence is at best moderating issues and there is need for greater integration and jointness.

Nuclear Command and Control System: Need for Intense Civil-Military Cooperation

India and Pakistan conducted the nuclear tests in 1998 and became *de facto* nuclear powers. The Kargil conflict was a limited one as the political leadership in India did not wish to enlarge the conflict as both countries had nuclear weapons. This led to limited use of air power, as this would need a wider area for effective operations. Post the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001, the Indian Army was ready to launch operations. This was termed as Operation Parakram. The Army stated that significant gains would have been made had the offensive been launched under political directions in January 2002. The military felt that they missed an opportunity. The political clearance not forthcoming, Pakistan improved its posture, reducing the chances by March 2002.¹³ The political leadership had to adjust to these issues and from the lessons

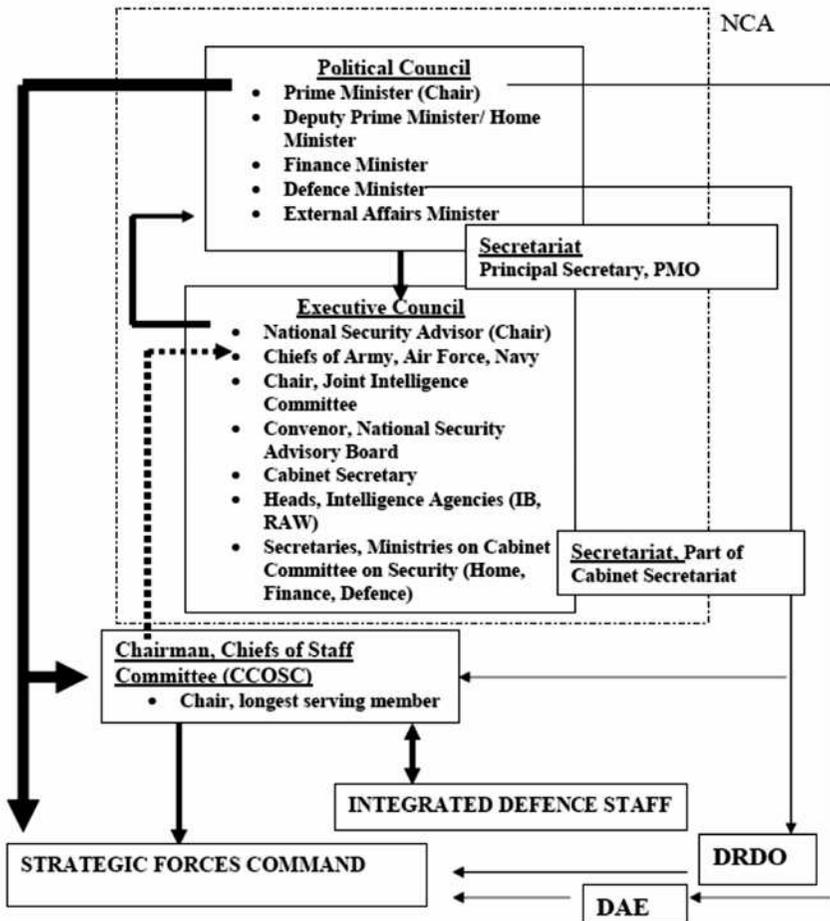
learnt, the Nuclear Command Authority was set up in 2003. The nuclear arsenal is controlled by the Nuclear Command Authority which consists of the Executive Council headed by the NSA and the Political Council headed by the Prime Minister.¹⁴

India had faced the command and control dilemma ever since the tests were conducted in 1998. Accordingly, a Draft Nuclear Doctrine was prepared which was accepted by the Cabinet Committee Security (CCS) on January 04, 2003.¹⁵ The Indian nuclear chain of command is tabulated below in Figs 1 and 2.

Fig 1: The Leadership Structure of the Indian Nuclear Chain of Command

| Civilian Leadership | Bureaucratic Leadership | Military Leadership |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Prime Minister | National Security Adviser | Chairman Chief of Staff Committee, in future CDS |
| Home Minister | Cabinet Secretary and Home Secretary | Chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Force |
| Defence Minister | Defence Secretary | C-in-C Strategic Forces Command |
| External Affairs Minister | Foreign Secretary | |
| Finance Minister | Finance Secretary | |

Fig 2



Source: Rakesh Kumar (2006).¹⁶

As cited above, Figs 1 and 2 clearly bring out the civil, bureaucratic and military leadership. Both these figures lucidly bring out the intense cooperation needed to be undertaken in a scenario of No First Use (NFU) and demated warheads with Permissive Action Launch (PAL).¹⁷ According to Lt Gen Pran Pahwa, such precise issues would need

immense coordination and rehearsals between all members.¹⁸ The next aspect which needs attention is an optimum defence budget.

Optimisation of Defence Budget

India's current defence budget is Rs 2, 95,511 crore which works out to just about 1.5 per cent of the projected Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2018-19. Military experts contend that to meet the modernisation requirements, it should be over 2.5 per cent.¹⁹ In its 41st report to Parliament, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP's) Maj Gen B C Khanduri explicitly stated that the capital allocations for modernisation of Rs. 21,338 crore will have an adverse impact on its combat capability. The Army has to slash at least 25 of the 125 'Make' projects. Similar is the case with the Navy and Air Force.²⁰ All three Services are undertaking transformation to reduce the revenue component of the budget to ensure that the impact on capital procurement is reduced. To face a two-front war, a professional armed force needs to modernise and be capable, for which the civilian set-up must provide the funding. This is an important aspect of civil-military relations which needs immediate attention. The civil administration in our set-up, while catering for other sectors of the economy, must look at the security interests. This would be possible when the country has a National Security Strategy and a Long-Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) approved by the CCS. The Finance Ministry has stated that funds have been allotted for improving connectivity to the border areas. This could be done, keeping modernisation plans under consideration. Certainly, the civil government needs to be sounded on the strategic interests of the military. This would keep relations between the two on an even keel.

Other Aspects

There are many other aspects which are impacting civil-military relations

currently. In the present dispensation, many of the shortcomings in India's national security framework can be attributed to the civil-military relationship which has not grown and matured to keep pace with the modern-day security challenges. A certain degree of uneasiness between the civil and military is inevitable, and exists practically in all countries. The bureaucracy in India has placed the military firmly in a cage, leaving the latter to fret, fume and flutter against the bars of the cage. This has caused unevenness in military decision-making which certainly does not serve national interests.²¹ The politicians must be educated on military matters in the Indian context. A short capsule could be run for members of the executive and Members of Parliament (MPs) as also bureaucrats of the Ministry of Defence on military strategy at the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) to educate civilians on military affairs.

Another issue which has cropped up recently is protection to the soldier while undertaking duties pertaining to counter-insurgency in the northeastern states and J&K. The armed forces are called in when the police and other civilian agencies have failed. They are operating in areas which are covered by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. If the actions undertaken by them need to be questioned, it is done after obtaining permission from the central government. However, recently the orders passed by the courts run contrary to this, resulting in investigations under the civil criminal law. Accordingly, 356 personnel have represented before the Supreme Court. Their representation before the court, "A situation of confusion has arisen with respect to their protection from prosecution... while undertaking operations in... proxy war, insurgency, ambushes and covert operations is justified".²² Their petition pertinently asks "whether they should continue to engage in counter-insurgency operations as per military orders or act and operate as per the yardsticks of the Criminal Procedure Code".²³ The issue is under judicial consideration and there is no doubt that the issue would be resolved. The point to be noted is that the military soldier must be protected by the civilian government.

Important Issues

Civil-military relations are extremely important for national security. Issues which need attention are as under:

- In a democracy, national security is of utmost importance. For civil-military relations to be on an even keel, a National Security Strategy is needed, which clearly outlines the ends and means for harmonious civil-military relations. The government must leave no stone unturned to introduce this document at the earliest. A draft of the document has been placed by the National Security Advisory Board on more than one occasion to former Prime Ministers but has not yet seen the light of the day. The document needs to be revised once in two years due to the change in dynamics.
- The need for an LTIPP which flows out from the National Security Strategy must be approved by the CCS. This would lead to the provision of adequate funds and a planned modernisation of our armed forces. There would be no adhoc measures to modernisation and the armed forces would be able to undertake their tasks with alacrity and military precision.
- The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) must be appointed by the government. Guarding of turf is inimical to national interests and the time has come for the government to undertake this change. This would synergise all the agencies involved with security.
- India is a nuclear weapon state and has a Nuclear Command Authority. There is a mix of civilians and military officials in the apex body. Our weapons are in a demated state, and the actions commence only after a nuclear attack due to the 'NFU' policy. There is a need for cooperation, a high degree of coordination and rehearsals to ensure precise actions at all level.

- The Army belongs to the nation. The nation must protect the soldier in sensitive situations, particularly during domestic utilisation.
- A capsule must be run at the IDSA for bureaucrats and MPs to educate them on strategy and military affairs.
- The armed forces must do their utmost to make civilians understand their methods and procedures by greater interaction at all levels. They must be given due respect, and cooperation must be effected at all levels, from top to bottom. There must be a total synergy for ensuring national security.

Notes

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