

Ashequa Irshad

INDIAN MILITARY POWER AND POLICY

During the past decades the international system has undergone some changes in terms of a diminishing focus on the European state system as the main concern of international relations. The post-War era saw the rise of the United States and the Soviet Union as the world's pre-eminent military powers. The singular focus of the theories and beliefs of international relations on the concerns and affairs of the super powers tended to overlook the rise of middle and small powers during the last years. However, the emergence and implications of these potent powers have still remained a relatively neglected field of study. These powers, newly-emerging with increasing military might within the context of an unstable international environment, are, in all likelihood, to have significant influence on the regional and, perhaps, also on the international levels.

In this paper an attempt will be made to trace the growth and ramifications of the South Asian power, India. A country of vast resources and greater aspirations, India has gradually consolidated her position as a power to be reckoned with. Power is a multi-dimensional and ambiguous concept. However, in this paper Indian power will be examined by analysing Indian military buildup and her projection of military strength. The main rationale for such an approach has been the Indian inclination to use military force as the main element of power projection, as the recent South Asian events

suggest. The stages of Indian military buildup, the examination of its policies and the main factors working behind would suggest the basics of this paper.

Though India has long advocated "Gandhism", "Pacifism" and "Non-violence", a careful study of India's strategic policies and capabilities reveal, however, that defence and military concerns play a critical role in the process of its growth as a power. Despite its poverty, it's clear that India has substantial military-industrial assets and a growing nuclear potential which have raised the security of the Sub-continent to the international level and brought home the fact that India has emerged as a factor in world politics. More than ever before India is exhibiting its independence abroad, backed by a large military force and a growing advanced industrial sector within the framework of political stability.

Indian Security Perceptions

The growth of Indian military power has been the result of some factors. We can identify mainly three types or categories of such factors. In the *first* category were decisions pertaining to the international political role sought by India in the post-War period. The *second* type includes actions by other states perceived negatively by India and the *third* type relates to the domestic environment of India. The interaction of these factors and Indian threat perception within the geo-political context relevant to India provide the basis for India's military buildup. Apart from these circumstances, also closely related are India's long term or semi-permanent security concerns. The *first* one relates to the international system itself, specifically the mutually exclusive nature of the bi-polar world. Being officially in neither camp, India perceived threats from both blocs. Such threats include super power rivalry, naval deployment in the Indian Ocean, sudden changes in the super power relations and sudden reversals in arms transfer policies in relation to the states of South Asia. The second source of insecurity stems from disputes over unsettled boundaries with both Pakistan and China. Despite

recent attempts to improve relations with both parties, India has never given up its claims over the disputed territories. The third set of insecurities stem from internal circumstances. Generated by conditions of poverty, problems of integration, challenges to state power by ethnic secessionism, these internal factors often have external ramifications in terms of overt or covert incentive for intervention by the outside powers.

The international role of the state is essentially a function of its power capabilities and its elite perception of such roles. Indian security perceptions as well as foreign policy postures have been shaped to a great extent by an appreciation of the country's actual and potential capacity as a great power on the one hand, and its elite perception for a major role in global politics on the other. The elite had always perceived a great power role for India—a role which they claim India deserves not only because India possesses nearly all the attributes of power but also because they had the right to retain the British colonial heritage particularly in terms of continental security and foreign policy postures. The great power potential of the country has been carefully nourished by its elite ever since winning independence in 1947. As one Indian scholar puts it :

From the perspective of its size, population, strategic location, the past creativity of its people, its abundant natural resources² endowment, most Indians have seen their country as a potential great power. It is precisely India's perception of itself as a potential great power—however distant that may seem that led to the policy of non-alignment in the first place. Underlying the policy of non-alignment, however, was a perception of a future great power role for India. Here Nehru was not only the exponent of non-alignment, but also the one who gave expression to such a role for India in the future. Indeed, he articulated his vision of such a role long before independence, though he often masked it in moral language.¹

1. Baldev Raj Nayar "A World Role : The Dialectics of Purpose and Power" in J. W. Mellor (ed) *India : A Rising Middle Power*, (New Delhi) - 1981) p. 122-23.

These aspirations gain further clarity in the words of India's founding father Nehru himself. He puts it like this :

A free India with her vast resources can be a great service to the world and humanity. India will always make a difference to the world; fate has marked us for big things. Leaving the (se) three big countries, the United States, the Soviet Union and China aside for the moment, look at the world. There are many advanced highly cultured countries. But if you peep into the future and if nothing goes wrong, wars and the like—the obvious fourth country in the world is India.²

A striking feature of the role perception has been the fact that over the years this perception has undergone very little or no change at all. Present day strategists like K. Subramanyam, dean of Indian strategic thinking, seems to echo Nehru when he says, "This country with its population, size, resources and industrial output will be a dominant country in the region just as the US, Soviet Union and China happen to be in their respective areas. This is just a fact of geography, economics and technology".³

The China syndrome in Indian security planning is a significant aspect that merits analysis. Apart from bilateral problems like the unsettled boundary questions, China remains a rival in the Indian quest for supremacy. Indians specifically resent China's standing in the international order—not only its status as a permanent member of the Security Council, but also its membership in the exclusive nuclear club. As a senior Foreign Ministry official put it, "why is China's power—its huge army and its intercontinental ballistic missiles considered absolutely acceptable, while India's is not? Why do Western analysts speak of India's drive to build a blue water navy while they remain silent about China's sub-marine launched ballistic missiles? There is no reason why India should not have military

2. Quoted in *ibid.*

3. K. Subramanyam, *Indian Security Perspectives*, (New Delhi, ABC Publishing House), p. 122-23.

power commensurate with its size as China does".⁴ Sino-Indian rivalries, of course, run deeper than resentment. India tends to see China as competitor in the strictest sense of the term. There is strong distrust, particularly among defence planners of each other's intentions. In fact, China remains a threat to the Indian claim to be the Asian power. As far back as the 1960s, India had undertaken aid programmes to counter Chinese influence among the smaller Asian and African countries.

The Pakistani factor is another significant aspect of the whole issue. India justifies its arms buildup by its compulsions arising out of Pakistan's acquisition of advanced weapons and concern over growing links between Pakistan and the US Centcom forces. Nuclear rivalry between the two remain as alive as ever. In fact, the escalating arms race between the two has posed serious threats to the security of the region.

The Indian thrust for regional supremacy is clearly drawn from New Delhi's defence and security perceptions which is essentially inherited from that of the British India. Indian continental concept of security implies that any threat to any of the buffer states within the Indian security perimeter was to be considered a threat to India. The Nehruvian vision of India was a closer Union, a confederation of independent states with common defence and economic interests. The perceived South Asian defence and strategic unity has come to be known as the Indian version of the Monroe Doctrine. Explaining the doctrine a noted Indian scholar writes :

India has no intention of intervening in the internal conflicts of a South Asian country and strongly opposes any intervention by any country in the internal affairs of others. India will not tolerate an external intervention in a conflict situation in any South Asian country if the intervention has any implicit or explicit anti-Indian implication. No South Asian government must therefore ask for external military assistance with an anti-Indian bias from any

4. *Time*, April 3, 1989

country. If a South Asian country genuinely needs to deal with a serious internal conflict situation, it should ask help from neighbouring countries including India. The exclusion of India from such a contingency will be considered to be an anti-Indian move on the part of the government concerned.⁵

Based mainly upon these considerations, India steadily has built up its military powers guided by carefully worked out policies. As Emile Benoit points out, "In consequence of its vast population and substantial GNP, India like mainland China, is able to maintain a modern advanced sector in the midst of its prevailing poverty, and this sector is, in absolute size, large than that of many far more advanced but smaller countries".⁶ Despite vast flows of arms into the Persian Gulf and special interest of the super powers in the Indian Ocean, India's military power will continue to have an edge over others due to the fact that it is based on domestic industrial efforts.

Over the past 42 years, India has slowly but steadily built up one of the world's largest armed force establishments from the minimal forces existing in 1947. The Army had then a total number of 300,000 soldiers, the Air Force—two fighters and one transport squadron, the Navy—Four Sloops, two Frigates and some Harbour Defence Crafts.⁷

India almost had no capacity to produce any lethal armaments. The military corps constituted of non-commissioned officers, mid-level officers and most importantly, the country's leadership had little or no experience about the role of armed forces as instruments of state policy. Indian leadership particularly Gandhi and Nehru had little

5. Bhabani Sen Gupta "The India Doctrine" *India Today*, 31 August, 1983.

6. Emile Benoit : *Defence and Economic Growth in Developing Countries* (Lexington : Lexington Books, 1973).

7. Onkar Marwah: "India's Military Power and Policy" in *Military Power and Policy in Asian States : China, Japan and India*", Onkar Marwah and J.D. Polack (eds) (Boulder, Colorado. Westview Press 1980) p-101.

interest in the military particularly in the pre-independence period. According to Gandhi, "Armed forces in India must plough the land . . . and do every other constructive work they can".⁸ Nehru's vision of a Great India had little to do with military power. As his policies indicate, Nehru favoured non-alignment and low military profile in spite of the Kashmir conflict of 1948. However, as the later years indicate the question of defence and meeting of security threats in terms of military power assumed a central position in the Indian quest of power, a fact illustrated by India's growing defence establishments.

India today is an important military power. The 13,62,000 strong armed forces are the fourth largest in the world. The Army is adding four new divisions to the 34 it already has, an increase in combat strength of 80,000 men. New Delhi's defence budget has doubled in real terms during the 80s and in fact outstripped the government ability to fund it. The 1988-89 budget, unveiled recently, has frozen defence spending at the previous year level. Officially defence allocation remains at about \$8.5 billion, though according to Indian defence analyst Ravi Rikhye, hidden, reclassified and subsidized items push it above \$ 11 billion.⁹ Since 1986 India has ranked as the world's largest arms importer; in 1987 it purchased weaponry from abroad valued at \$5.2 billion, more than the imports of Iran and Iraq combined. India also is entering the arms market in a substantial way. Apart from the prestige it entails, the income will help India finance its defence shopping list.

Another significant aspect has been the Indian decision to quadruple its military research and development budget since 1982 pouring billions of dollars for projects like the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), a field of research for which India is likely to receive US help. Indian domestic armament industry in 1979 was the biggest

8. Quoted in S. P. Cohen, *The Indian Army* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971), p-103.

9. *Time* April 3, 1989, p-7.

among Third World non-communist states in value, volume, diversity of manufacture and R & D facilities.

Apart from sophisticated conventional weapons, India has demonstrated nuclear capabilities and sophisticated Missile Programme and plans to build Intermediate Range missiles. Recently, India launched its first IRBM Agni, a show piece of multi-million rupee integrated missile development programme which will enable India to acquire vital re-entry technology.

The evolutionary growth of Indian military power is traced below, based on historical perspective and interaction of the three factors given above. In this context, the changing perspective of the ruling elite and the likely effect of India's emergence as a power in regional and extraregional context will also be noted. By studying the different phases of this buildup along these dimensions, one can identify the nature as well as the effects of this buildup.

First Phase of Indian Military Power and Policy 1947-1962 : In spite of the wide involvement of the Indian Army in the Second World War, the British India Government instituted a policy of swift demobilization of the country's armed forces. When India gained independence in 1947, the Army had shrunk from 2.5 million to a mere 500,000.¹⁰ Following the partitioning of the Sub-continent, the assets including the soldiers and weapons were divided between the two states on an approximate 2 : 1 ratio. The then Indian Army displayed all the negative features of a former colonial army in terms of command capability, training and material backup. Though the country acquired about a dozen ordnance factories, the only lethal weapons produced were the Lee Enfield Rifles, light machine guns and rudimentary artillery pieces. Apart from material shortcomings, there was no national experience about the role of armed forces as instrument of state policy. Further, there was an element of estrangement between the leadership and the Army, as in nationalist perceptions, the military in the past had discharged

10. Onkar Marwah *op cit.* p-107.

the functions of an army of occupation in India. While no formal purges were taken up, the military's drain on the public treasury was drastically reduced. Though the military was to be maintained as an arm of the state, its subordinate status to the civilian sector was abundantly clarified. The strength of the armed forces were reduced just enough to meet the Pakistani threat. In 1948 India had easily made Pakistan succumb and the Indian defence planners assumed that Pakistan would remain inferior to India.

The 1950 takeover of Tibet by China was an event that had an impact upon India's defence planning. A high level committee recommended the strengthening of border defence on the Indo-Tibet boundary. At least upto 1957 the Indian government had been hesitant to invoke vigorous and publicized programme of Himalayan security measures.

The Indian elite perception as regards Indian security policy making was perhaps most lucidly explained by Nehru. Termed as non-alignment or neutrality, Nehru had enunciated its basic tenets as early as in 1931. He said, "It may be that some will covet her but the master desire will be to prevent any other nation from possessing India. No country will tolerate the idea of another acquiring the commanding position which England occupied for so long. If any power was so covetous enough to make the attempt, all the others would combine to trounce the intruder. This mutual rivalry would itself be the surest gurantee against an attack on India".¹¹ From 1947 until today the broad framework of Indian security policy making has not diverged in a significant manner from the preceding geo-strategic assessment of the Indian position. In a broader geo-political context the Indian leadership perceived no deep-seated anxieties about the global intent of the Soviet Union or the United States in relation to their country's security.

11. Quoted in Onkar Marwah from Lorne J. Kavic, *India's Quest for Security* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967), p-23.

The signing of the Mutual Security Pact in 1954 between the United States and Pakistan substantially changed this perception. It was an event that India could neither prevent nor ignore. Responding to the US flow of arms to Pakistan, India began procuring arms herself from sources other than the US. Though India lost its earlier two-to-one superiority over Pakistan in armour and aircraft, it retained the same in the case of armoury. Pakistan for its part equalled but never acquired a substantial edge over India in attack weapons system either in the ground or in the air. As such Pakistan managed to balance India but never acquired any significant offensive capacity against India, probably conforming US designs. Yet Indian policy makers did not consider this a benign matter and initiated long term measures to counter the Pakistani threat. India laid the foundations of its domestic armaments industry under the leadership of V.K. Krishna Menon. The decision to go for domestic armaments industry originated from the feeling that over time Pakistan could be militarily neutralized without requiring any major change in future Indian policies to suit foreign weapons suppliers.

The Indian defence buildup at this stage was indeed comprehensive. Under V.K. Krishna Menon's guidance, the foundation for domestic armaments industry were laid. In fact in the main sectors of defence production i.e. in aircraft and tank manufacture, Indian aircraft industry made a start, though modest, as early as in 1940 when the Hindustan Aeronautics Industry (HAL) was established. The assembly and later the manufacture under license of Percival Prentice trainer aircraft was the first major undertaking by HAL and a locally assembled aircraft took off on its maiden flight in 1948; by 1956 Vampire Jet Aircrafts were being manufactured.¹²

The defence industry base was rapidly expanded and by the late 60s a vast system of defence industries had been installed. These

12. Mohammad Iqbal : "India's Indigenous Defence Production : Aircraft and Armoured Vehicle", *Regional Studies*, Vol VII, No 1, Winter 1988-89, p-87.

industries were largely the consequence of Nehru's particular vision regarding the defence requirements of India. He had long advocated the industrial route to both national economic development and defence. Aware of the requirements of modern warfare, he favoured the establishment of an Indian industrial base upon which could be built an autonomous defence structure.¹³

Though India embarked upon a modest programme of boosting its defence capabilities during this period, a relaxed view of defence needs was adopted partly because of the priorities of the development on the one hand, and the reliance on diplomatic efforts to resolve issues on the other. Defence expenditure remained at around 1.5% of GNP and no significant long term plan for defence was initiated. Meanwhile the deterioration in Sino-Indian relations induced some changes in the Nehruvian view of defence. At this stage India dropped its opposition to the supply of Soviet arms as the military cooperation between the United States and Pakistan made it almost a political necessity. Other events that spurred defence preparedness as well as domestic production was of Pakistan's joining SEATO and CENTO. But it was the disastrous twelve weeks war with China in 1962 which had a significant effect over the Indian military policy inaugurating the second phase of Indian military power and policy from 1962-1971,

Second Phase 1962-1971 : Indian border dispute with China surfaced in 1958, four years after the military alliance between Pakistan and the US had been formalized. In the immediate aftermath of the war India appeared to abandon selectivity as to the choice of its sources for the supply of weapons. Equipments came from sources as diverse as the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, West Germany, Canada and Yugoslavia. It was the defeat that substantially and radically changed the Nehruvian view of defence, diplomacy and development. Hard core strategists found it

13. Stephen P. Cohen And Richard L. Park : *India : Emergent Power* (New York: Crose, Pussak & Com Inc. N.Y. 1978), p-18.

to be too utopian and idealistic. Military strength was increasingly being viewed as a vital component of national power and its use a vital necessity to counter the adversaries of India. A distinct feature of Indian defence planning was the fact that long term defence needs were assessed not on the basis of foreign procurements, rather on the basis of local production to meet those needs. This was another issue on which the Western powers demurred at Indian goals while the Soviets supported them. India at this stage undertook a dual track approach. While going ahead with interim purchase of weapons from wherever they could be acquired, India also embarked upon a determined effort to create domestic arms production capacity. The aeronautical industry was the first one to receive a big boost. It was decided that the assembly and later the manufacture of MIG-21 fighter aircrafts would be undertaken under an agreement with the Soviet government.¹⁴ Most of the major weapons programmes undertaken by India have been characterised by a gradual accumulation of Indian expertise; a tank factory was developed in cooperation with Vickers of Great Britain, three Mig factories built by the Soviet Union, and the Leander Class frigate programme started with British assistance. In short, the leisurely pace of developing the armament industry was speeded up and its requirements classified under high priority category within the general context of planned development. From 1964, five year defense plans became rolling adjuncts of the country's five year economic development plans. Along with the rearmament drive, steps were taken to create the necessary civil and military infrastructure to support the armed forces in any future hostilities in the Northern and Eastern borders. In fact, the armed forces were converted into a modern and integrated military establishment from their former description of parade ground forces. The mission and task of the armed forces were precisely defined in terms of the second type of threat to Indian security—Pakistan and China were to be militarily countered. In October 1964 China exploded its first nuclear device. This event influenced two aspects of the Indian

14. M. Iqbal *op cit.* p-87.

defence planning; firstly, that Indian conventional rearmament plans would be diligently pursued and that its nuclear and later space research activities would be steadily expanded to achieve the technical capacities being acquired by China.

In 1965 a twenty two day war broke out between India and Pakistan within a year of the commencement of India's first five year defence plan. In retrospect, it appears that the large scale increases and modernization of the Indian armed forces following the 1962 clash with China probably led to this crisis. The war ended through a UN-sponsored Cease Fire, the tactical gains of either side were minimal and were traded off in the Soviet sponsored peace settlement. The 1965 war revealed some interesting aspects of the military policies and armament plans of both India and Pakistan. It reflected to a certain degree the merit of India's indigenous defence production choice, as the arms embargo imposed by the United States and the Soviet Union hurt Pakistan's military capability more than India's diversified weapons base. In the aftermath of the war, Pakistan sought to diversify its weapons supply source by inviting Soviet aid for itself. The 1965 war contributed much towards strengthening of Indian intentions regarding the extensive armaments' goals of India. The apparent Pakistani ability to seek accommodation and receive benefits from such ideologically diverse sources as the United States, China and the Soviet Union vindicated the earlier Indian assessment that Indian recompense would be best sought by a domestic and therefore independent arms industry and military organization.

The 1971 war between India and Pakistan found the Indians well prepared. By that time the first five year defence plan had been implemented and the second one had commenced. Indian military was well prepared to meet the challenges of a two-front war. It embarked upon the campaign with a superiority over Pakistan in effective equivalent combat terms of 8 to 1 in aircraft, 4 to 1 in troops and 5 to 1 in naval vessels.¹⁵ A distinct feature of this capacity was

15. O. Marwah *op cit.* p-114.

the fact that all the small arms and ammunitions and a significant proportion of the heavier materials were of local manufacture. The rapid advance of the Indian army in East Pakistan with its extensive water terrain and in face of the tough resistance of the professional Pak army impressed many military observers. In fact, the staff planning of the war was done by India in Sub-continental dimensions. The ground movements were integrated with naval attack squadrons and well planned air attack campaign averaging 500 sorties per day.¹⁶

The 1971 war established India as the undisputed dominant power of the region. Judging from a military perspective, although the results of the war were a foregone conclusion, several unforeseen events, closely related to Indian security perception, took place. These events, in later analysis, would appear to have had wider implications than the immediate results of the war. The *first* of these was the initial wavering of Soviet support preceding the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971. The *second* was Sino-US rapprochement and the *third* was the United State's sending of the Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal.

Signing of the treaty heralded the era of a strong security relationship with the Soviet Union, particularly as regards the transfer of sophisticated arms and defence technology. These events further alerted India to the possibility of a strategic axis comprising of China, Pakistan and the United States. By informal accounts the Enterprise episode effectively influenced the Indian decision to proceed with a nuclear test. Likewise, India's rocket and electronics development programme was sharply upgraded in the months following the 1971 war.

Third Phase 1971-1979 : The success of the Indians in breaking up Pakistan and effectively reducing its power evidently impinged in a big way on Indian security perceptions. Militarily India established herself as the dominant power of the region, a position recognized by other powers of the world as well. Ever since India defeated

16. *ibid* p-115.

Pakistan, the United States has begun to acknowledge Indian primacy in the Sub-continent. This is in contrast with the earlier hope that Pakistan, buttressed by external support through supply of hardware, could be an equalizer—or something close to it—in terms of military power. One of the earliest expressions of the change in US perceptions is found in President Nixon's foreign policy *Report in Congress in February 1972 in which he said*: "The crisis of 1971 transformed South Asia. Of interest to us will be the posture of South Asia's most powerful country now adopts towards its neighbours in the subcontinent."¹⁷

At this stage one can identify a period of relaxation in Indian defence buildup. In contrast to the previous wars, the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war did not result in any major emphasis on expanding arms production or creating new projects. Despite the permanent call for self-sufficiency in the supply of arms, no major design breakthrough was experienced in the 1970s. The period is characterised by a continued growth of existing projects for indigenous and licensed production. In 1973 the Minister of Defence stated in Parliament that, in future India would renounce cooperation with foreign producers and licensed production to reduce the vulnerability to embargoes on spare parts.¹⁸ In 1975 the arms embargo imposed by the Western powers was lifted and India went for a diversification of its weapons supply. In the late 1970s the Janata Government initiated a survey of West European aircraft industry with the aim of diversifying its sources of supply, particularly through reducing the Indian Air Force's total dependence on MIG aircrafts. Any substantial departure in this regard was prevented by the return of Mrs. Gandhi to power and the Soviet Union remained the single most important supplier of arms.¹⁹

17. Dilip Mukherjee : "US Weaponary for India" *Asian Survey*. Vol XXVII, No. 6 June 1987, p-598.

18. H. Wulf : "India, The Unfilled Quest for Self Sufficiency in *Arms Production in the Third World*, Michael Brozka and T. Ohlson (eds), SIPRI, Taylor and Francis, London and Philadelphia, 1986, p-130.

19. M. Iqbal *op cit*. p-89.

Fourth Phase 1979 to Present : In the late 1970s the defence build-up of India was speeded up primarily in response to two important international events, notably the renewed US supply of arms to Pakistan following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the second was the military collaboration between China and the United States. India naturally tried to match the Pakistani buildup. A striking feature of the recent rearmament programme is that instead of relying exclusively on the Soviet Union, India is diversifying its sources of supply while maintaining its close military cooperation with the Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, this diversification of supply sources emphasized West European and American license agreements, parallel to the continued production of Soviet weapons.

Planned or existing major acquisitions of licences to produce arms in India include Soviet Mig-27 and -29, British Jaguar fighters, West German Do-228 transport planes, Soviet T-72 tanks, French-West German Milan anti-tank missiles and West German submarines.²⁰ Since most of these new technologies are aimed at gradual transfer to India, the initially heavy dependence on foreign sources is not considered to be a setback for the goal of self-sufficiency. The Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) project is one with which India is announcing its military coming of age. Scarcely five years ago, India would not have embarked upon so ambitious an enterprise. One of India's aim in the LCA project is to master and eventually manufacture the currently foreign made high tech components that the LCA will use. The United States certainly appears sympathetic to Indian aspirations in this regard. One can mention the technology transfer and military sales agreement signed between the two. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) of October 1984 regarding transfer of sophisticated technology has answered India's needs for dual use technologies relevant to both civilian and military industries. Given India's extensive links with the Soviet Union, New Delhi has

20. *Op cit.* p-128.

been having a hard time obtaining licenses and the MOU was intended to alleviate the situation.²¹ The United States, it appears, is willing to share the military technology for the development of LCA, a main battle tank and facilities for testing conventional missiles. The US apparently considers that through transferring sophisticated technology and equipment they can make India less dependent on the Soviet Union. The Soviets are not ready to lose their influence and the leasing of the Charlie—1 class nuclear-powered submarine to India last year was interpreted by SIPRI analysts as an attempt to regain influence by upgrading its supply to new kinds of technology. India appears to be the net gainer in this regard and is evidently enjoying its leverage and freedom to shop around the world for defence technology and buildup its own capability. While it is going ahead with the manufacture of European designed deep penetration fighter bombers, it is busy assembling Soviet Mig -27 fighters and considering offers for the co-production of the even more sophisticated Mig-29.

Indian naval and nuclear arms and ballistic missiles programmes are proven indicators of India's changing military power and policy perception. The pro-nuclear lobby led by K. Subramanyam believes that India has no choice but to go nuclear if they want to achieve Great Power status and deter the adversaries—China and Pakistan. As he puts it 'China will never deal with India on equal terms so long as India does not rectify the nuclear imbalance. Slowly as Pakistan's nuclear capability becomes public, India's neighbours will treat the former with greater deference than the latter. Even the Soviet Union in spite of its friendliness cannot but have reservations about a country which lacks the will to power. The Soviet Union has an interest in having at least one friendly nuclear weapon power in the world.'²²

21. Dilip Mukherjee : "US Weaponary for India" *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXVII, No-6, June 1987, p-601.

22. K. Subramanyam : "Nuclear Power Perspective" *World Focus*. 95-96. Nov-Dec, 1987, p.48.

India's sophisticated missile programme can be cited as another example of its strong modernization drive of its military capabilities and a further step up the ladder of great power status. After several initial setbacks India successfully launched "Prithvi" and "Agni" intermediate range missiles capable of carrying a payload of more than 2000lbs. India also has plans to develop surface-to-surface missile (Akash), air-to-air missile "Trishul" and anti-tank missile "Nag". India's nuclear and missile programmes are closely related. Though India acknowledges that it is trying to develop intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBM), it is denying plans to equip them with nuclear warheads. However, as research analysts point out, if India manages to overcome the problem of developing IRBM nose cones and guidance system and assumes the position of being able to deploy them it will be looking for ways to go nuclear in a public way. Dharendra Sharma, a professor of Science Policy at the Jawaharlal Nehru University puts it this way, "Because of India's stockpiling of plutonium and its massive investment in IRBMs, India will turn to the nuclear option thereby proclaiming its great power status within the next five years.

India today is a major naval power. In 1979 India undertook a major plan to modernize its naval capability in terms of sea denial and offensive capacities. Among the Asian naval powers only India has carriers in its service—two light World War II vintage ships. The addition of the nuclear powered submarine "Chakra" to its already existing fleet of 14 submarines invited international attention as to the purposes of the buildup. It appears from the nature of the buildup that India is demonstrating increasing interest in operating well outside the coastal seas. India already has the largest Navy among the Indian Ocean littoral states. Indian naval buildup apparently aims to make it too risky by the year 2000 for either super power to act in a hostile manner in the Northern Indian Ocean. The Flag Officer Commanding in Chief of the Indian Eastern Command Vice Admiral Ramdas said recently that India was engaged in building missile-equipped Corvette Frigates, Ocean

Survey Ships and oil tankers. As he puts it "we are changing from a buyer's navy to a builder's navy".²³ Besides, additions to the Indian Air Force have also to be taken into account. As one American analyst noted : "As part of India's overall arms buildup, IAF modernization provides a military underpinning for India's claim of a middle power status in the context of global interaction."²⁴ The growing number of aircrafts capable of deep sea penetration and interdiction is relevant in this context, more so because a squadron of Jaguar fighter bombers is reported to have already been earmarked for maritime strike duties. Likewise, a transport aircraft being built with West German assistance is to have 24 maritime patrol variants, equipped with anti-ship missiles. If these operate out of the Andamans or Lakshwadeep, the capacity of disrupting sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean will be greater still.²⁴ Recently 5 TU 142 M Bear Soviet-made long range reconnaissance maritime aircrafts have been added along with 3 IL 38 (May) aircrafts. Thanks to this addition India is now capable of keeping vigil over the vast area stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Madagascar in Africa.²⁵ Commenting on the Indian naval expansions the military journal *Janes Fighting Ship* in its 1986-87 number said, "This is not the inventory of a country whose only purpose is to remain at peace in a peaceful ocean."²⁶ India has, however, repeatedly denied any offensive plans. The Indian analysts take pains to point out that carriers and submarines, however, only provide one dimension of power projection : control or denial of the sea and air to the enemy.

An attempt has been made to trace the evolutionary growth of Indian military buildup and note changes in its policy in this regard.

23. *Inquilab* (in Bangla) 21 July, 1989.

24. Jerald F. Elkin "The Indian Air Force of the 1980s" *Air University Review* 35-36 Sept Oct 1984, quoted in Dilip Mukherjee, *Asian Survey*, p.599 op : cit.

25. D. Mukherjee *op cit.* p.600.

26. *Inquilab*, *op cit.*

The portrayal of Indian might clearly establishes India as a major military power and this naturally invites the analysts' attention to the motives as well as to the effects of this buildup in regional and extra-regional contexts.

However, before analysing this, it would be useful to analyse the threats in the present context. As far as the second type of threat is concerned, it emanates almost exclusively from China and Pakistan. Though the threats are real today, they have attained different dimensions. In the writings of Indian scholars these threats are mainly identified as military amounting to challenges to Indian power and position. Historically, as our study of Indian defence buildup indicates this type has had fairly constant influence on Indian military policy, particularly as regards defence planning. However, questions arise today about the validity of these threats as primary motivations behind this massive arms buildup. In terms of military strength India has pulled well ahead of its arch foe Pakistan. Current weapons ratio in the Sub-continent stands clearly in India's favour, as for example in main battle tank (2:1), in major surface warships (3:4:1) and in combat aircraft (2:1). India further enjoys nearly insurmountable advantages over Pakistan in two key areas. One is its ability to mobilize domestic resources to meet the staggering costs of accelerated defence modernization programmes and the other in indigenous defence production.²⁷ As far as the Chinese threat is concerned, many analysts today point out that apart from maintaining close ties with Pakistan, Beijing throughout the 1970s and 80s took no military or diplomatic action that could be construed as threatening by New Delhi. "This threat remains largely ephemeral" observes R.R. Subramanyam, Senior Research Associate at the Indian Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis.²⁸ The fact is as T.P. Thornton, director of Asian Studies at the Johns Hopkins University, points out that the buildup has taken on a

27. R. G. Wirsing : "Pakistan/India Military Imbalance in the Subcontinent", *Journal of Defence and Development*, 1987, p.52.

28. *Time*, April 3, 1989

momentum of its own and India is increasingly pushed to find a threat and rationale to justify its military strength. Analyst Rikheye echoes this when he says that Indian military buildup has never been primarily a reaction to external threats.²⁹ Instead, ever since independence India has dreamt of being a major military power. Many Indians believe that the world must learn to live with Indian power and through this buildup they can assert their rightful place in the international arena.

Indian military buildup is related to changes in its overall policy regarding projection of power and use of force. Indian military sector is to be a major component of the overall Indian power structure and its use indicative of Indian emergence as a power. Recent South Asian history certainly substantiates this analysis. India is demonstrating a propensity and readiness to use force as an instrument to realize foreign policy objectives. Although in one of his comments in 1988 Rajiv Gandhi dismissed any Indian aim to dominate its neighbours,³⁰ facts speak otherwise. In the 1980s notably under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi India has aggressively imposed its will and authority over developments in some smaller countries of South Asia. This is what some observers call the Rajiv Monroe Doctrine.

The combination and interaction of all these factors identified have led to the Indian buildup. But the primary motivation springs from the desire to achieve power. This naturally brings us to the question of the implication of this fact in the global and regional context.

Implications of the Indian Military Buildup

As far as the implications of the buildup is concerned, it can be said that globally it has served to reinforce the regional power status

29. *ibid*

30. *ibid*

of India. However, the recent buildup, particularly Indian naval expansion as well as the sophisticated missile programme are inviting attention as to the scope and range of Indian intentions. Specific points such as India's acquisition of a nuclear submarine and Soviet-built long range reconnaissance planes have been raised in the Australian parliament. Recently, as press reports suggest, the United States has expressed concerns at the launching of the IRBMs. But, as pointed out earlier, the major powers are unlikely to question Indian quest for power. India has the implicit and sometimes even explicit support of the super powers in its behaviour within the region. Ever since India defeated Pakistan in 1971 the US has openly acknowledged Indian supremacy in the Subcontinent. This recognition has now attained regional dimensions.

However, it would take quite some time before India can emerge as a global power with capacity to act well beyond its immediate neighbourhood. Its effectiveness as a power continues to be curtailed by the economic constraints it faces. In spite of its impressive military might, India remains one of the poorest nations of the world. This economic gap is likely to hinder Indian growth as an effective global power. However, poverty as a statistical feat need not obviate great power status. Though it is not necessarily true that defence and development objectives should be in conflict, some times even the reverse can be true; yet in the Indian context this high defence spending is certainly raising some controversy. Many observers are questioning the moral of the whole issue as to whether it is right for a country to spend millions of dollars on rockets when most of its people do not even have access to pure drinking water. These problems continue to pose as a formidable barrier to the Indian aspirations for power. Perhaps the overall cost of the military expansion is best measured by examining the defence sector's drain on such scarce resources as foreign exchange, petroleum and skilled manpower. In fact some observers fear that India's seemingly intractable domestic problems may foster the growth of military power since muscle flexing abroad may divert the public attention from the problems at home.

In India there is surprisingly little public debate over these issues. Commenting on the speculations over India's fast growing military strength, Indian Defence Minister K.C. Pant said recently. "The size of a country's defence forces should be determined by its security environment and defence responsibilities. Considering our vast land, territory, long coast line, the exclusive economic zone, island territories and maritime interests, India's defence forces are just adequate to defend the country effectively. Exaggerated accounts of India's military strength could be just part of disinformation campaign by vested interests."³¹

In the immediate region the ramifications of Indian power continues to be manifest with certain ominous trends and may warrant timely attention as well as carefully worked out responses based on rational policies. The South Asian states today face a critical situation. As Prof. G.B. Khanal of Nepal puts it, "For a small country the best neighbour is a rich country with a small army. The most dangerous enemy is a poor country with a big army."³² The enormous pre-eminence rendered to India in the South Asian regional configuration by the facts of geography, economics and technology is something about which the neighbours can't do much but accept as a part of international political reality. Response to the Indian power and position will call for careful balancing between Indian pre-eminence and predominance. This can be done through the identification of the grey areas between total submission to Indian power and self-defeating policy of hostility. Since the smaller states of South Asia can be compared to minnows alongside the Indian whale, confrontation will not be a viable option. Rather the smaller nations of South Asia should move towards putting their own houses in order to effectively build up a viable national order in terms of political and economic systems. Only a well developed and integrated polity, however small it might be, can significantly blunt the manifest predominance of an immediate giant.

31. *The Times of India*, Monday, July 17, 1989.

32. *Newsweek*, September 25, 1989.

India is at the transitional stage of becoming a power when projection of strength becomes a matter of critical importance to her. But the rationality of such a policy remains questionable in the present international situation when we witness an increasing trend of devaluation of military power. There is an increasing tendency to reject the unidimensional dependence on military power and search for alternative sources as we are observing in case of the USSR and the Peoples Republic of China. Raw military power has lost much of its appeal as it tends to work against the national interests. USSR and China with their military might in East and Southeast Asia had the minimum or no political return. India is also likely to face a similar situation, perhaps, early due to her relatively narrow resource base.

There are indications too of this in India which are reflected in the budget earmarked for the military. Many analysts believe that the boon years for the armed forces are over and the next few years will see a severe tightening of budget. In the regional context too, India seems to have felt the need for promoting peace in keeping with the changing international environment and her recent attempts to improve relations with her arch rival Pakistan are indications towards a positive approach. But at the same time, India is avowed to match the newest Pakistani acquisition of major weapons, thereby further escalating the arms race. In spite of growing speculations about the effectiveness of military power, India seems determined to continue its search for power while repeatedly denying aggressive motives. India appears to have seriously taken the advice of K. Sundarji, one of the architects of post 1962 military buildup who said, "To be weak is not virtuous, being prepared is not being provocative". Perhaps time will demonstrate the truth of this observation.