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INTERNAL-EXTERNAL LINKAGES, AND CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN INDIAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

INTRODUCTION

India stands out as one of very few developing countries where the military did not seize power in the post-World War II (WW II) period. It is an enigma to many as to why this is so.

Although there were speculations in the early decades of India's independence about the possibility of military takeover, the Indian military has not intervened, nor has it ever displayed the wish to do so.[1]

Like many earlier writings, it is argued here that India's British heritage of civil-military relations emphasizing the doctrine of civilian supremacy in the decision making process, reinforced by a series of Constitutional and organizational mechanisms has contributed to the maintenance of democratic system in India. This was complemented by strong leadership of the Congress Party and charismatic leaders such as Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

This paper, however, adds to that argument that this institutional aspect was further reinforced by the almost total absence of any deep

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1. For some idea on this issue, see, Taya Zinkin, "India and the Military Dictatorship," *Pacific Affairs* 32, 1 (March 1959), pp. 89-91. For an account of an early difficulty in civil-military relations in India, see, Lorne J. Kavic, *India's Quest For Security: Defence Policies, 1947-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 141-169, specially, pp. 154-169.

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interaction with foreign military establishments. Of particular impor-
tance here is the absence of any indoctrination of the Indian military in
the National Security Doctrine (NSD) to fight communism in the
domestic scene. Unlike Brazil or Peru in the 1960s, the Indian military
itself also did not articulate any National Security Doctrine (NSD)
claiming for itself any internal political role which might have created
a strong justification for military takeover in certain circumstances.
This was further facilitated by the non-affiliation of India with the US
Cold War policies and almost total absence of arms transaction
linkages between India and the US leaving no chance for the Indian
military to be influenced by the US Cold War and anti-communist
doctrine.

However, recent internal role expansion (albeit under civilian
guidance) of the Indian military has raised concerns that continuous
use of the military in what is called "aid-to civil" might weaken the
military's ideology of civilian supremacy and the military might take
political initiatives.

This paper discusses briefly the evolution of Indian civil-military
relations in the context of Indian political system and Indian position
during the Cold War period and its external military linkages.

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS, AND INDIAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Indian civil-military relations is considered unique as well as
puzzling among the developing countries because of the Indian
military's acceptance of civlian supremacy, a phenomenon seldom
observed in most developiong countries.[2] This civilian control of
military has contributed signficantly to the maintenance of democratic
stability in India.

2. Stephen P. Cohen, "Civilian Control of Military in India", in Claude E.
    Welch, Jr., ed., *Civilian Control of the Military : Theory and Cases From
    Developing Countries* (Albany, NY : State University of New York Press,
    1976), pp. 43-61.

The Indian military was the natural successor to the British Indian military. The post-independence civil-military relations in India was derived from the civil-military relations adopted by the British colonial administration in India. Its officers inherited a tradion of subjecting themselves to the civilian authority. Although the British Indian Army was the most efficient instrument of controlling and suppressing nationalist movement, it had always discharged its duties under the guidance of civilian administration represented in India by the Viceroy and in Britain by the Secretary of India and parliamentary committees.

The post-independent Indian leadership strengthened civilian control. The intention of the National Congress leaders was expressed even before independence in their handling of the issue of the Indian National Army (INA). The INA was a formation of the break away Indian officers and troops numbering 20,000 of the Royal British Indian Armed Forces. Formed by Subhash Chandra Bose, a radical nationalist, the INA sought German and Japanese help in its fight to liberate India from the British while the Congress leadership was committed to achieving freedom in a peaceful manner. However, because of popularity of the INA, its leader Subhash Bose, and the cause it was supposed to serve, the Congress leadership was eager to credit the INA for the heroism and idealism of its members. Nonetheless, the Congress leaders were adamantly opposed to the reentry of the INA officers in the post-independent Indian armed forces out of concern that such an act would introduce politics in the forces endangering the doctrine of civilian supremacy. Many Indian officers themselves considered INA officers as having violated professional ethics.[3]

In September 1946, in preparation for transfer of power to the Indians, an interim government was formed composed of the members

3. Loyd I. Rudolph and Susan Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Laksmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: Chicago Univesity Press, 1987), pp. 70-71; Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of A Nation* (Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 147-168.

of Congress and Muslim League under the last Governor General, Lord Mounbatten. Sardar Baldev Singh was appointed as defence member of that government, equivalent to defence minister. But, the Commander-in-Chief (C-In-C) of the Royal British Indian Army ceased to be a member of the Governor General's Executive Council (though he remained C-in-C of the Army).[4]

Starting from that point, successive governments have taken a series of organizational and constiutional measures to reinforce the value of civilian supremacy. First, ostensibly to facilitate balanced development of all three services (army, navy, air force), the Nehru government elevated the posts of the chiefs of air force and navy to the status of C-in-C which reduced in importance the numerically largest and potentially politically powerful army. By 1955, the government abolished the post of the C-in-C and the chiefs of three branches became chiefs of respective branches, e.g., Chief of Army Staff. Inter-service coordination among them is maintained through the Chiefs' Committee chaired by the chief with longest carrier.[5]

Constitutionally, the president is the C-in-C, but the real authority is wielded by the cabinet and its leader, the prime minister. The Nehru administration strengthened civilian authority over the military through a civilian/politician-led defense ministry in the policy making process reducing the autonomy of the Indian defence forces. It also devised various committees to coordinate issues related to defence. All of them were headed either by civilian cabinet members or civilian bureaucrats from the defence and finance ministries. The Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC), later named in 1978 the Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet is the highest policy making body on defence matters. Chaired by the prime minister, its members include ministers of external affairs, defence, home (interior) and finance. The minister

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4. P.R. Chari, "Civil-Military Relations in India," *Armed Forces and Society,* 4, 1 (November 1977), p. 9.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-14; Cohen, 1977, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-56.

of defence, who has the power to change any suggestion made by the military chiefs is the primary link between the cabinet and the Chiefs. Although it is a convention that the three Chiefs give professional advice to the cabinet and sit in the Political Affairs Committe when strictly military issues are reviewed, they have no membership to the Committee.[6] In between the Political Affairs Committee and the Chiefs of Staff Committee is the Defence Minister's Committee, headed by the Defence Minister himself thus establishing further control over the military. Information policy and responsibilty for defence production has been given to the ministry of defence. In addition to these, several Committees such as Joint Intelligence Comittee have also been formed. In 1990, a National Security Council (NSC) with the Prime Minister as Chair and ministers of defence, finance, home, and external affairs as members to coordinate defence related matters has been formed.[7]

These were added to by strong institutions like the Congress, civil bureaucracy, and leaders like Nehru. In this respect, it should be mentioned that Stephen Cohen has suggested an alliance between the politicians and bureaucrats to subordinate the military immediately after independence.[8] Whether or not there was an alliance between the bureaucracy and politicians, the fact remains that the military's position was politically, morally, and financially weaker than the other two institutions-political institutions and civil administration (bureaucracy) in the aftermath of independence.

The Indian military, unlike many third world militaries, neither played any role in its independence nor had any say in its early

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6. Jerrold F. Elkin and W. Andrew Ritezel, "The Debate on Restructuring India's Higher Defense Organization," *Asian Survey* 24,10 (October 1984), pp. 1070-1074; Sumit Ganguly, "From the Defense of the Nation to Aid to the Civil: The Army in Contemporary India," *Journal of Asian and African studies* 26, 1-2 (1991), pp. 11-16; Cohen, 1990, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-177.

7. Cohen, *Ibid.*; Ganguly, *Ibid.*

8. See, Cohen, *Ibid.*, 171. Veena Dukreza, *Civil-Military Relations in South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Pblications, 1991), 211, and Chari, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 10-11, disagree with Cohen on this issue.

political setting. It was discredited as an "army of an occupation force" for its unquestioned discharge of British orders against the nationalist leaders. Thus, it really had no moral/legitimate claim for active role in politics. Moreover, no military leader could match either Nehru, or later Indira Gandhi, for instance, in popularity as well as moral claim to power.

However, it should be mentioned that this was a very temporary phenomenon, and within a very short time, the Indian military found a place in the development of Indian nation. It played a crucial role in the early days of independence in maintaining Indian territorial integrity in Kashmir, its forces secured the forcible incorporation of Heyderabad in to the Indian Union, crushed the communist uprising in Telengana, and later seized the Portuguese colony of Goa in 1961. The 1947-'48 Indo-Pak war on Kashmir demonstrated the importance of strong military as the Pakistani border was clearly seen as a security threat. The military thus had a very concrete and clear external focus on security threat. With the Chinese revolution in 1949 and Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950, India was also faced with another clear potential external security threat although that did not crystalize until the 1959 Sino-Indian border clash. From the very beginning, the military was given a clear external role to play--maintaining India's security from external threats.

COLD WAR, EXTERNAL POLITICO-MILITARY LIN-KAGES, AND INDIAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Moreover, Indian politicians were obsessed with the autonomy of Indian state and its sovereignty which required a strong state symbo-lized, in part, by a powerful military. Indian political leaders' aspira-tion to make India militarily and industrially powerful also led them to spend enormous amount of money, mainly, since the 1962 Sino-Indian war, on defence. Although military spending was low up to the 1962 Sino-Indian war compared to post-1962 level, a large share of total governmental expenditure was spent on defence in the early years of independence as Table1 indicates.

Table1. India's Defence/Military Expenditures.

Year!	%GOE Spending	GNP/ NNP*	Year	GNP
1950-'51/ 1953-'54	33.25	1.85	1963-'73	3.36
1954-'55/ 1957-'58	20.9	1.85	1974-'78	3.22
1958-'59/ 1961-'62	15.95	2.15	1979-'88	3.7

Sources: For 1950/51-1961-62, Lawrance A. Veit, *India's Second Revolution: The Dilemmas of Development (New York*: McGraw Hill book Company, 1973), p. 112. Figures indicate annual average percentage of Defence Expenditures. Subsequent figures indicate Military Expenditures. *figures indicate percentage of Net National Product (NNP). Subsequent figures indicate percentage of GNP. For other figures, Sources: US Agency for Arms Control and Disarmament, World Military Expenditures, *op. cit.* various issues.

Table 1 shows that almost 1.85% of NNP was spent on defence until 1958. It went up during 1959-62 period to 2.15% of NNP. Since 1963, it never was lower than 3% of total and enlarged GNP. From the very beginning, India also attempted to build military industries for its self-sufficiency in military production which got a tremendous impetus after 1962.[9]

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9. For the evolution of India's military industrial capability, see Gordon, *India's Rise to Power in the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (New York St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1995), pp. 19-44, 55-79; Chris Smith, *India's Ad Hoc Arsenal: Direction or Drift in Defence policy?* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 41-202; Amit Gupta, "The Indian Arms Industry :A Lumbering Giant," *Asian Survey* 30,9 (September, 1990), pp. 846-861.

In terms of external military linkages, even after the departure of the British in 1947, the Indian army was basically dependent on the British army for training, weapons and equipments and defence-related materials.[10] Many top positions of the Indian military continued to be filled by the British officers for some time after the independence.

The previous discussions have shown how Indo-US relations could not evolve into military relations during the Cold War. As a

TABLE 2. Arms Supply to India by Suppliers (in current $ million)

Year	Total@	USA	USSR	Western Countries	Eastern Countries
1947-54	N.A.	None	None	N.A	N.A.
1955-63	N.A.	None*	None	N.A.	N. A.
1964-73	1697	88	1273	137	142
1974-78	1900	30	1600	90	50
1978-82	3600	40	2800	565	150
1982-86	9275	90	6800	1955	250
1984-88	13,120	200	9600	2690	410
1987-91	13,250	180	10200	1130**	340
1991-93	1430	70	1100	150	110

Source : U. S. Arms Control And Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfer* (U. S. Department of State), 1980 : p. 160; 1984 : 98; 1987, 130; 1989, 118; 1994, 134; 1995, 142. *After the 1962 Sino-Indian war, India received about $90 million worth of US military assistance. @Discrepancy is due to the omission of "Other" minor suppliers. Canada, France, Italy, the UK, and West Germany. Bulgaria, Poland, and Czechoslaovakia. **"Other Europe" $million 1300.

10. P.R. Chari, "Indo-Soviet Military Cooperation,"*Asian Survey* 19, 3 (March 1979), pp. 230-232.

result, Indo-US military links could not be established. Table 2 vividly displays the absence of Indo-US military links and demonstrates very strong Indo-Soviet military linkages.

Pakistan's receipt of US arms in 1954 increased India's defence worries. Consequently, India began to look for sources of miltary hardware. Because of liberal westernized values, the Indian military elites and many others were favourably disposed to have ties with the west in general and the US in particular rather than the Soviet Union. In reality however, the opposite had happened.

Up to 1960, the UK was the primary source of Indian militray hardware. Opportunity for Indo-US military linkages came after the 1962 Sino-Indian war. Indeed, India received considerable military aid during 1962-65 which was again postponed in 1965 following the Indo-Pakistan War in that year. On the other hand, Indo-Soviet relations improved steadily since the mid 1950s. Reportedly, Nehru considered purchase of Soviet arms for India as early as in 1955. The first Soviet military supply to India took place in 1960 when India bought some $31.5 million worth of Soviet helicopters and drop-supplying planes. After the 1962 Sino-Indian war, Indo-Soviet military connection grew stronger partly because of India's view that China's enemy, the Soviet Union, would be a more reliable guarantee against the Chinese threat.[11] This relationship continued virtually unchanged until the late 1970s when the Janata Government, "to bring India back to real Non-alignment", bought Jaguars from Britain, and, in 1981 Indira's government bought two submarines from West Germany. After the end of the Cold War Indo-US strategic and military relations have been slowly improving as reflected in several visits by the officials of both sides to each others's country. The Indo-Russian (successor to the Soviet Union) relations are yet to reach the pre-1991 stage.

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11. Noor A. Hussain, "India's Regional Policy: Strategic and Security Dimenstion," in Stephen Philip Cohen, ed., *The Security of South Asia: American and Asian Perspectives* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1987), pp. 29-32.

MILITARY ROLE EXPANSION, AND CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

The Indian military's acceptance of civilian supremacy does not mean, however, that the use of Indian forces in internal affairs is not common. On the contrary, the Indian military has been continually performing important domestic roles. Known as "aid-to-civil", these functions range from maintaining law and order to fighting separatist and insurgency movements to quelling riots by the police and para-military forces. The tradition has been inherited from the British colonial rulers who often used the military aganist the nationalist movement. The use of military in "aid-to-civil" in the early years of independence was not too high. Between 1951 and 1970, the army was called into suppress domestic violence on approximately 476 occasions.

However, with the erosion of Congress hegemony, rise of centrifugal forces in the periphery, and criminalization of politics, military deployment has increased significantly. The military's internal role has expanded since the late-'70s. The 18 months from June 1979 to December 1980 saw 64 instances of army being deployed to bolster civil power on 369 occasions, most frequently to quell public disturbances, communal violence and maintain law and order.[12] This trend has grown stronger making the Indian military the world's most active peacetime military losing nearly 10.000 of its troops during peace time.[13]

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12. See Jerrold F. Elkin and W. Andre Retezel, "Military Role Expansion in India," *Armed Forces and Society* 11, 4 (Summer 1985), pp. 490-492; Stephen P. Cohen, "The Military and India's Democracy," in Kohli, ed., 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 124. Also see, Ramesh Thapar, "The Militarisation of Indian Poitics," *Economic and Political Weekly* (28 July, 1984), p. 1179; "Misusing The Army," *India Today* (15 May, 1985), p. 5.

13. Shekhar Gupta, W.P.S. Sidhu and Kanwaar Sandhu, "Defense: A Middle Age military machine", *India Today* (30 April 1993), pp. 22-27.

It was understood by the Indian political leaders in th 1950s and 1960s that the increasing use of the military in "aid-to-civil" might have negative impact on the military's professionalism pulling it into politics. To prevent that from happening, the government created an array of central police and para-military forces to relieve the military.[14] However, due to corruption in the state para-military and police forces, and politicization of many of these institutions in many states by the local political office holders, the military is still deployed, in many cases, to quell rebellion by the state police and para-military forces themeselves.[15]

The deployment of the Indian forces in the North-Eastern states (particularly, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Assam) of India to fight the insurgents demanding either greater autonomy, semi-independence, or outright secession from the Indian Union, is not new. The military has been doing it since the mid 1950s. For sometime, it seemed as though the Indian government had succeeded in defeating the insurgents in the North East. But, a new wave of insurgency movement has appeared in the 1980s, this time, not only in North East India, but also in the peninsular India, namely in Punjab and Kashmir, with much more serious political and strategic implications.[16] In addition to some states in North East, Jammu and Kashmir has been under (*de facto*) military rule under the cover of President's rule since 1990.

The Punjab operation, code named, "*Operation Blue Star*", provoked mutiny among some Sikh units in the Indian military and profoundly demoralized retired as well as in-service Sikh officers. The

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14. See, K.P. Misra, "Para-Military Forces in India," *Armed Forces and Society* 6, 3 (Spring 1980), pp. 371-386.

15. Cohen, 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-128.

16. Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., "The North East, The Punjab, And The Regionalization of Indian Politics," *Asian Survey* 23, 11 (November 1983), pp. 1171-1181; Ganguly, 1991, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

difference between suppression of insurgency in North East India and Punjab is significant for Punjab is one of the most important recruiting grounds for the Indian army. Up to 1984, Punjab supplied about 10-12% (roughly 100,000-120,000) of the total military manpower. The Sikhs are much more represented in Indian society, politics, and economy than the North Eastern Indian tribal people making it difficult for the Indian military to maintain its image as the symbol of national unity and appear to be acting as the agent of government against the people (read Sikhs).[17]

The increasing deployment has brought the military (particularly the army) into close public contact lowering its professional standard and morale and has introduced corruption. Increasing deployment exposes military personnel to political controversy as the "*Operation Blue Star*" or the statement by General Baidya (later Chief of Indian Army Staff) praising a Congress-led alliance against the CPI (M)-led Left Front government in the state of Tripura highlighted.[18]

Observing the increasing use of armed forces, scholars[19] have expressed concern that civilian control is changing from an objective one to a subjective one. The use of military in "aid-to-civil" might not lead to immediate military takeover in India given India's entrenched and historical tradition of civilian domination of military. But an

17. On the Sikh upsurge and "Operation Blue Star," See, Paul R. Brass, "The Punjab Crisis and the Unity of India," in Kohli, ed., 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-213; Cohen, 1988, pp. 132-137; Shahnaz Anklesaria, "Fall-Out of Army Action: A Field Report," *Economic and Political Weekly*, (28 July, 1984), pp. 1186-1188.

18. For the statement, see *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121. Barbara Crosssette in her *India: Facing the Twenty-First Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 115-119 has described corrupt behavior of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) deployed in Sri Lanka during 1987-1989.

19. Cohen, *Ibid.*, pp. 99-143; On concerns about military depeloyment, see, Thapar, *op. cit.*; "Misusing the Army," *op. cit.* Also see, K.F. Rustamaji, "Dealing With Disorder," *Seminar No.* 308 (April 1985), pp. 18-20; M.L. Thapan, "Crutches," *Seminar No.* 308 (April 1985), pp. 21-24.

increasingly expanded domestic role may create a feeling among the military officers that they can handle the situation better than the civilians. There has been a growing sense of influence of the military in India. This has been highlighted by the loss of Congress hegemony, fragmentation of political institutions and power bases, and increasing centrifugal tendencies. There might develop the notion among some sections of the civilians and the militray as well that only the military can maintain law and order, unity of the country, and govern effectively. The civil-military relations has probably changed from one of military's domestic role as "aid-to-civil" to "civil-military partnership" though the Indian civil-military relations is well below the threshold where military intervention might become inevitable.[20]

Such pessimistic views must be tempered by the Indian military's lack of any kind of well articulated ideological doctrine, like the NSD, asserting its role in internal politics.The decision to use the military in internal affairs does not come from the military itself but from the civilians indicating the dominant position of the civilians in the policy making process. Lack of such a doctrine is one of the indicators that it is not politically highly motivated.

The military has been most heavily involved in North East India, which is more important for external security than internal. North East is not generally considered an integral part of the internal security and politics. Furthermore, as Cohen has suggested, the counter-insurgency operations in North East provide the Indian military with practical combat training.[21]

CONCLUSION

It should be mentioned, however, that unlike Brazil and Peru, whose militaries were indoctrinated in the NSD, India is presented

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20. Cohen, *Ibid.*
21. Cohen, 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

with clear and concrete security threats from external sources such as China and Pakistan. This fact of external orientation imposes limit on the Indian military's will and ablility to engage in domestic politics despite recent internal role expansion.[22] In short, despite role expansion, the Indian military remains below the level where the military might intervene in politics.

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22. Elkin and Ritezel, 1985, *op. cit.*, pp. 499-502.