

This paper examines the defence reforms process in India. It begins by briefly examining previous efforts at defence reforms and the factors that led to the post-Kargil defence reform. Next it analyzes the Kargil Review Committee and its follow up, the Arun Singh Committee and describes some of the debates therein. While examining the implementation of defence reforms it then argues that despite some incremental progress they have failed the vision of their architects. This is primarily due to bureaucratic politics and the unique features of civil-military relations, which can be more accurately described as an “absent dialogue.” The penultimate section describes recent calls for re-visiting the defence reforms process but argues that without political will this is unlikely. The research methodology relies on interviews with key decision-makers, reports of the Parliamentary Standing committee and other secondary sources.



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Failing to Deliver

Post-Crises Defence Reforms in India, 1998-2010

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New Delhi
March 2011

Anit Mukherjee

Introduction

As in the way of a democracy, in the panic of the moment they are ready to be as prudent as possible.

Thucydides

This paper analyses civil-military relations in India from 1998 to 2010. Specifically it examines the reforms undertaken within national security agencies and their eventual outcome. In doing so it explores two major questions—what precipitated the reforms in India’s national security agencies after the 1999 Kargil war? And, what was the impact of these reforms and did they achieve their stated objectives? The current state of opinion on this topic holds that the reforms were driven by two main factors. First, India’s nuclear tests in 1998 and a concomitant desire to be considered a responsible nuclear power with credible deterrence under firm civilian control. Second and perhaps more importantly as a result of the recommendations made by a committee that investigated intelligence failures leading to the 1999 India-Pakistan war in Kargil. While examining the reform process, it is argued that they were only partially successful and, in many areas, have been undone by a “silent subversion” undertaken by entrenched bureaucracies. A more forceful and comprehensive set of reforms need to be pushed by political leaders.

The first part of the paper analyses the events that led to the formation of the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) and its follow-up the Group of Ministers report. While the Kargil war in 1999 provided the main impetus for constituting the former, there were other factors that intensified the demand, both from within the military and from certain sections of the strategic community, for re-examining the interaction between higher defence institutions. Next it studies the two reform committees, their functioning and their major recommendations. This is followed by an analysis of their implementation and argues that uncontroversial reforms that created additional organisations and posts were largely implemented, while others were either ‘subverted in practice’ or unimplemented by entrenched bureaucracies—both civilian and military. The penultimate section explains why an ‘absent dialogue’ best describes civil-military

relations in India. In conclusion it re-visits the debate on defence reforms in India and argues that forceful political intervention is needed to remove structural flaws in national security agencies. However at the same time the probability of this sort of political intervention taking place remains unlikely.

Setting the Stage: The Precursor to the Reforms

At the end of the Cold War, with a world transformed, the strategic community in India was debating the institutional structure of decision-making on defence affairs. The momentum for the debate came as a result of the disastrous military expedition to Sri Lanka from 1987-90.¹ The collapse of the Soviet Union, a dependable ‘ally’ and a reliable source of military hardware, also presented new challenges and opportunities. However, unsurprisingly, the main driver of the reform process was domestic politics. In 1989 a coalition government led by VP Singh had assumed political power after defeating Rajiv Gandhi’s Congress party in the general elections. The election campaign was held against the background of the disastrous, and often dismissed as futile, military campaign in Sri Lanka and more crucially by the Bofors arms scandal.² Hence, after assuming office Prime Minister VP Singh announced two major national security initiatives. First - a move which would have far-reaching consequences - was to appoint former minister of state for defence Arun Singh to head a Committee on Defence Expenditure (CDE) ostensibly to rationalise military expenditure but which was “actually meant to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the entire defence set-up.”³ Its wide-ranging recommendations proved to be so controversial that it was marked ‘secret’ and, despite repeated requests from the parliament’s Standing Committee on Defence, has still not been made public.⁴ According to some accounts, this committee had recommended integration of civilian and military financial offices, closure of redundant

¹ The Indian army fought an intense counterinsurgency campaign against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from 1987-1990. See Shankar Bhaduri and Afsir Karim, *The Sri Lanka Crisis* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1990).

² The Bofors arms scandal refers to the controversy over allegations of corruption in the procurement of artillery systems for the army in 1986. For the report of a parliamentary inquiry see Lok Sabha, *Report of the Joint Committee of the Indian Parliament to Inquire into the Bofors Contract* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1988).

³ Inder Malhotra, “A tale of two Aruns,” *The Hindu*, May 17, 2000.

⁴ See Standing Committee on Defence, *Demand for Grants (1994-95), Second Report* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, April 1994), p. 13.

ordnance factories, and other reforms that were largely unpalatable to civilian bureaucrats.⁵ The report allegedly was also inconvenient for the service chiefs as it potentially curtailed some of their powers. Knowing that its recommendations were opposed by civilian bureaucrats, the service chiefs adopted the unique stance of “all or nothing.”⁶ In other words, either the *complete* report should be implemented or not at all. Expectedly no action was taken on this report and it was quietly buried. The second measure announced by Prime Minister VP Singh was the establishment of a National Security Council to “take a holistic view of national security issues in the light of the external, economic, political and military situations and their linkages with our domestic concerns and objectives.”⁷ The newly constituted National Security Council, however, met only once before it too was quietly shelved.⁸ Opposed by existing bureaucracies it could not survive the fall of the VP Singh government. More importantly, subsequent prime ministers Chandra Shekhar and especially PV Narasimha Rao were not keen to push the idea.⁹ Thus, by the mid-1990’s efforts for reforming India’s higher defence organisations had seemingly reached a dead end.

The debate on the need to do so, however, gathered pace especially in intellectual circles. George Tanham’s acclaimed but controversial RAND essay—*Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay*, helped spur the debate and gave it a visibility that it previously lacked.¹⁰ Tanham argued that due to its unique geography, history and religion, India lacked a strategic culture. While this argument was attacked, in turn, by a number of Indian commentators the renewed debate helped set the stage for the next round of defence reforms.¹¹ Around the same time, independent of Tanham’s

⁵ See Neeraj Kaushal, “India’s Defence Budget: Can it be Reduced?” *Occasional Paper* (University of Urbana-Champaign: ACDIS paper, June 1995), pp. 8-9.

⁶ Interview with former high-ranking defence official, June 24, 2009.

⁷ Government of India, *Gazette of India, September 22, 1990* (New Delhi: Rama Publishers, 1990), pp. 652–653.

⁸ Shyam Babu, “India’s National Security Council: Stuck in the Cradle?” *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2003, pp. 215-230.

⁹ Narsimha Rao’s opposition to the NSC is best described in Babu, “India’s National Security Council: Stuck in the Cradle?” pp. 221-222.

¹⁰ George K. Tanham, *Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1992).

¹¹ For a counter to Tanham’s argument see Kanti Bajpai and Amitabh Mattoo (eds.), *Securing India: Strategic Thought and Practice* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996).

work, a number of Indian strategic analysts had come to another conclusion—that the decision-making process on national security needed restructuring. This generation of reformers was itself a motley group consisting of former bureaucrats and military officers. This intellectual ferment was led by former ministry of defence officials like K. Subrahmanyam and PR Chari and retired military officers, like K Sundarji, Satish Nambiar, VR Raghavan, Dipankar Bannerjee, Jasjit Singh, KK Nayyar, Raja Menon, Gurmeet Kanwal and Uday Bhaskar. They, in turn, used their positions either in the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) or the United Services Institution of India (USI), India's official think tanks, to spread their ideas.¹² Their efforts were complemented by a vibrant print and electronic media that emerged from the economic and information liberalisation policies of the early 1990's. Journalists like Inder Malhotra and Shekhar Gupta also played an important role in building a critical mass in support of reforming the national security system. Finally the revival of the parliament's Standing Committee on Defence in 1993 allowed members of parliament to directly interact, analyse and comment on national security issues.¹³ Their reports, arrived at after interviewing both officials and non-officials, enhanced the visibility of the debate.

Despite a growing consensus that changes were essential, there was little agreement among the political class on how to go about it. The debate on defence reforms found more traction with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) than the other major national party—the Congress.¹⁴ The reason for this was two fold. First, the Congress party has had a historical fear about empowering the military by altering the existing structures of power. The fear of a military coup preyed upon both Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira

¹² There were many others— military officers, bureaucrats and journalists making this argument in journals and in the media. This next generation, for reasons of space, cannot be listed here but they now constitute the 'strategic conclave' mainly around New Delhi and benefited the most from the recent boom in think tanks in India.

¹³ Soon after independence Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru did away with the standing legislative committee system. However, 17 departmentally related Standing Committees were created in 1993 to increase the interaction and effectiveness of the legislature. See Arthur G. Rubinoff, "India's New Subject-based Parliamentary Standing Committees," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 36, No. 7, (July 1996), pp. 723-738.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the BJP's foreign and nuclear policy, see Partha Ghosh, *BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), pp. 313-365.

Gandhi.¹⁵ While this was less an issue after the 1975-1977 emergency, the fear of altering the existing structures remained. Hence, despite Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's own admission that the NSC system "was found a little unworkable" nothing was done to reform it.¹⁶ Secondly, prominent members of the BJP were more interested in defence matters while the Congress suffered from a lack of intellectual interest. For instance, Jaswant Singh, a soldier turned politician, had been raising these issues for a while in the media and in parliamentary forums.¹⁷ Moreover, KC Pant, the Congress's traditional politician with experience in the defence ministry switched loyalty to the BJP on the eve of the 1998 elections. Thus, when the BJP-led coalition government came to power in 1998, it quickly implemented two major initiatives that were a part of its manifesto.¹⁸ First it gave the green light to India's nuclear scientists to conduct a test in the Pokhran desert.¹⁹ The second was to appoint a committee led by KC Pant to examine and suggest reforms in establishing a National Security Council (NSC) in India.²⁰ The other members of this committee were Jaswant Singh and Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, then the Director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA). However the Vajpayee government did not immediately act on their recommendations. Instead, three major events precipitated the next stage of national security reforms—nuclear tests were conducted in defiance of the international community, the naval chief was unceremoniously dismissed and a border war was waged in the Himalayan mountains with Pakistan.

¹⁵ Apurba Kundu, *Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 109-118, 163 and Harsh Pant, "India's Nuclear Doctrine and Command Structure: Implications for Civil-military relations in India," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 33, No. 2, January 2007, pp. 242-243.

¹⁶ Lok Sabha, *Lok Sabha Debates, 1995, Thirteenth Session, Tenth Lok Sabha* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, May 16, 1995): columns 290–304.

¹⁷ For an essay describing his perspective see Jaswant Singh, "What Constitutes National Security in a Changing World Order? India's Strategic Thought," *CASI Occasional Paper No.6* (University of Pennsylvania, June 1998), also see his *Defending India* (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 1999).

¹⁸ The 1998 election manifesto committed to establishing a National Security Council and "to reevaluate the country nuclear policy and exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons." See <http://www.bjp.org/content/view/2632/376/>

¹⁹ Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace: The Secret Story of India's Quest to be a Nuclear Power* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2000), pp. 32-34.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 31.

“A nuclear afternoon, an Admiral sacked and a made-for-TV summer war”

At 3.45 pm on May 11, 1998 the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in a hastily convened press conference announced that India had successfully tested three underground nuclear bombs in the Pokhran desert. The news, subsequently depicted as a major intelligence failure, caught everyone by surprise and evoked much international criticism. In the Oval office, the US president Bill Clinton angrily told his aides “to come down on those guys like a ton of bricks.”²¹ China while condemning the tests accused India of exercising regional hegemony and called for the elimination of its nuclear arsenal. The Australian government suspended ministerial, senior officer visits and the entire bilateral defence relationship. Individual nations, notably Japan, invoked a number of commercial, technological and scientific sanctions. The tit-for-tat Pakistani nuclear tests soon after, did little to mitigate India’s diplomatic isolation. However, tentatively but surely Indian politicians and diplomats reached out to other powers, most notably the US. The message was simple—India was a responsible nuclear power that, while continuing its voluntary moratorium against nuclear tests, wishes to engage in a dialogue. In making this case India had to show that it had command and control elements in place for securing its arsenal, preventing proliferation and unauthorised use. Responding to such apprehensions on November 19, 1998 the government announced the creation of the NSC that would work under the Brajesh Mishra, the National Security Adviser.²² However it was not until April 1999 when the Gazette of India provided formal sanction to the NSC.²³ Crucially the NSC model that was adopted was at variance with the recommendations of the KC Pant committee.²⁴

²¹ Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), p. 52.

²² See Government of India, *National Security Council Set Up* (Press Release, November 19, 1998), <http://pib.nic.in/archieve/lreng/lyr98/11198/r191198.html>

²³ Government of India, *Gazette of India, April 19, 1999* (New Delhi: Rama Publishers, 1999), pp. 4–8.

²⁴ See “Report of the Kargil Review Committee: An Appraisal,” *CLAWS Journal*, (Summer 2009), p. 25 and Satish Chandra, “National Security System and Reform,” in Satish Kumar (ed.), *India’s National Security Annual Review 2005* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2005), p. 207.

The second impetus for reforms came from the circumstances surrounding the unprecedented dismissal of the chief of naval staff, Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat.²⁵ On December 30, 1998 the flag officer commanding-in-chief of India's southern naval command, Vice Admiral Sushil Kumar, was flown from his headquarters in Kochi to New Delhi in an aircraft operated by the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's intelligence agency. His mission was to replace Admiral Bhagwat who, unusually, was not aware that his flag officer had left his post.²⁶ At 4.30 pm, Admiral Bhagwat was told by a ministry of defence official that he was being dismissed from his position, effective immediately. The dismissal order was signed by an additional secretary in the MOD, creating another point of dispute between civilian bureaucrats and military officers.²⁷ Within 15 minutes, the new chief, Admiral Sushil Kumar, was given the oath of office. This was all a part of the plan, conceived and executed by a small circle of Indian politicians, bureaucrats, selected military officers and intelligence agencies. In fact, the other two service chiefs were not informed until the very last moment.²⁸ However, there was a quid pro quo. The defence secretary Ajit Kumar was shifted the same day to a different ministry. This was done ostensibly to please senior military officers, who were unhappy with his style of functioning. A few months before this incident in a rare joint letter to the defence minister the three chiefs of staff (of the navy, air force and army) had written what amounted to a devastating indictment of the defence secretary:

We have been finding that Shri Ajit Kumar has a negative and unsupportive attitude in several matters of importance. This 'negativism' has percolated down among all echelons of the Ministry Staff. The

²⁵ For more on this see Sunil Dasgupta, "India: The New Militaries," in Muthiah Alagappa (ed.), *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 111-113.

²⁶ Kuldip Nayar, "Why was Bhagwat Sacked," *Rediff on the Net*, January 09, 1999, <http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/jan/09nayar.htm>

²⁷ Military officers would have preferred the order to be signed either by a higher ranking officer like the Cabinet Secretary or a political authority. This controversy echoed the 1962 India-China war, when the decision to "throw out the Chinese" was conveyed to the military by a Joint Secretary. See SN Prasad, PB Sinha and Colonel AA Athale, *History of the Conflict with China 1962* (New Delhi: History Division, Ministry of Defence 1992), p. 96.

²⁸ Interview with General VP Malik, New Delhi, June 30, 2009.

Defence Secretary also tends to be brusque and insensitive to the PSO's [Principal Staff Officers] and the COSC [Chief of Staff Secretariat]. This is not conducive to harmonious team-work.²⁹

Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat's dismissal predictably generated controversy in the Indian media with finger-pointing and calculated leaks either defending or discrediting him.³⁰ To deflect some of the criticism defence minister, George Fernandes, "promised to implement by the month-end a decade-old plan to restructure the ministry of defence and make the civilian bureaucracy and the military brass function more cohesively and with less rancour."³¹ In fact, for a number of years now, the service chiefs were lobbying for change and reorganisation in the higher defence structure.³² While doing so, they usually referred to the recommendations made by the Arun Singh led Committee on Defence Expenditure in 1990. Sensing an opportunity in early January 1999, immediately after Admiral Bhagwat's sacking, General VP Malik organised a briefing for the defence minister and the other service chiefs reiterating the demand for 'restructuring the ministry of defence.'³³ This briefing also suggested the creation of a chief of defence staff (CDS) position and to execute these reforms General VP Malik suggested appointing a committee under Arun Singh.³⁴ Under fire from his critics and wishing to placate his military commanders, Defence Minister George Fernandes quickly agreed and made a press statement to that effect.³⁵ However, within days Air Chief

²⁹ This letter is reproduced in Sukumar Muralidharan, "An Unjust Dismissal," *Frontline*, Vol. 16, No.2, January 16-29, 1999. According to Brijesh Mishra this letter was not shared with the PMO (Prime Minister's Office) and hence he was unaware of the complaints made by the chiefs, interview, New Delhi, November, 2009.

³⁰ For two very different perspectives see Prabhu Chawla, "Voyage of Intrigue," *India Today*, January 19, 1999 and Sukumar Muralidharan, "The Admiral Bhagwat Challenge," *Frontline*, Vol.16, No. 7, March 27-April 09,1999.

³¹ Raj Chengappa, "Hornets Nest," *India Today*, January 18, 1999.

³² See Gaurav Sawant, "VP Malik upset with Bhagwat's writing," *Indian Express*, February 18, 2001.

³³ The briefing was conducted by the Director General, Defence Planning Staff (DGDPS), email from General VP Malik to the author, July 09, 2009.

³⁴ Interview with General VP Malik, June 30, 2009.

³⁵ See "Fernandes sets up panel to restructure defence ministry," *Rediff on the Net*, January 08, 1999, <http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/jan/08def.htm>

Marshal Tipnis objected to these measures and effectively scuttled this initiative. His fear, mirroring the air force's historical suspicion of army-led institutional restructuring was that such an exercise might dilute the power of the individual services.³⁶ Hence despite talk of defence restructuring nothing was done in practice. That kind of change required a much bigger crisis.

Undoubtedly, though, the main reason for the reforms was the Kargil war fought between India and Pakistan in the mountains in Kashmir in the summer of 1999. Even while the two armies were in combat, the Indian government acknowledged that its intelligence agencies and the military were completely surprised by the Pakistani infiltration. In a bid to deflect public criticism, the government quickly constituted a committee of experts with the following terms of reference:

- i. To review the events leading up to the Pakistani aggression in the Kargil district of Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir; and
- ii. To recommend such measures as are considered necessary to safeguard national security against such armed intrusions.³⁷

Thus, while there was a general clamour for reforms in light of nuclear tests, establishment of the NSC and the circumstances surrounding the sacking of Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, the Kargil war provided the perfect trigger. This war then, like most wars, transformed India's approach to its national security—but imperfectly.

³⁶ The Indian Air Force has traditionally opposed the sort of restructuring favoured by some in the army. For instance after the Bangladesh war then Chief of Air Staff was able to successfully prevent General Sam Manekshaw's proposals to alter higher defence organisations. See Top Secret letter from PN Haksar to Indira Gandhi, December 24, 1972, Subject File no 56, PN Haksar Papers (I and II Instalment), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), also see PC Lal, *My Years with the Air Force* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1986), pp. 326-328.

³⁷ See Kargil Review Committee, *From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), p. 25.

The Reform Committees

The Kargil Review Committee (KRC):

KRC was composed of three members and one member-secretary. The chairman was K. Subrahmanyam, undoubtedly the doyen of strategic studies in India. Having worked for a number of years in the MOD, a founder member of IDSA and a key consultant to successive prime ministers on the Indian nuclear weapons programme, Subrahmanyam had the intellectual ballast, integrity and experience to take on this task. The two other members of the committee were Lieutenant General KK Hazari, a former vice chief of army staff and BG Verghese, a distinguished columnist tasked to examine information operations. The member-secretary was Satish Chandra, the serving chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), India's apex intelligence analysis body. The committee in a short span of six months interviewed numerous serving and former officials including presidents, prime ministers, defence ministers, civilian bureaucrats, intelligence agencies and military officers and submitted its report to the government. After some hesitation, the government tabled the report in the parliament in February 2000.

This committee was unique in many respects. It was not constituted under the Commissions of Inquiry Act and thus did not have formal authority to investigate, summon witnesses or requisition documents. However, at the same time, "it was given the widest possible access to all relevant documents, including those with the highest classification and to officials of the union and Jammu and Kashmir governments."³⁸ In order to elicit maximum cooperation from different bureaucracies, the committee made it clear to all concerned that it would not fix responsibility on particular individuals or institutions. Also, unlike previous inquiries, which were mainly military in nature, this committee examined the entire political-bureaucratic-military dimensions of India's national security. Finally, this report with some security deletions was presented to the parliament and thus made public. Publishing rights to the report (with security deletions and without appendix and annexure) were also given to a printing press

³⁸ Ibid, p. 27.

and quickly made available. This level of transparency was unprecedented and provided an ideal platform for a subsequent debate on national security that played out in academic, policy and journalistic circles.

The KRC however fetched a fair amount of criticism centring on its mandate and analysis. One of the main criticisms was that it was *not* an investigative inquiry and conveniently did not attempt to assign responsibility for the lapses that led to the Pakistani intrusion.³⁹ Other critics alleged that the committee was designed to cover up failures made at senior levels of the government, intelligence and the military.⁴⁰ As all agencies had a vested interest in covering up their lapses, they were content to settle on the non-investigative mode of inquiry that the KRC subsequently undertook. The committee tried to pre-empt this criticism by acknowledging that it was interested in the “lessons the country and guardians of its security can learn from the Kargil experience”⁴¹ and not in conducting an inquisitorial witch-hunt. They also argued that this approach allowed them to gain maximum cooperation from key decision-makers and different agencies.

The Group of Ministers Report:

Subsequent to the presentation of the report by the KRC, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on April 17, 2000 constituted a group of ministers (GOM) to review the national security system in its entirety and to implement the recommendations made by the KRC. Further it created four task forces to examine different aspects of national security, namely internal security, intelligence, border management and management of defence.⁴² The task force on defence, the one most relevant for this paper,

³⁹ A.G. Noorani, “The Kargil Committee expedition,” *Frontline*, Vol. 17, No. 6, March 18-31, 2000.

⁴⁰ See Praveen Swami, “A committee and some questions,” *Frontline*, Vol. 17, No.2, January 22–04 February, 2000; also see by the same author “The Kargil Story,” *Frontline*, Vol. 17, No. 22, October 28- November 10, 2000.

⁴¹ See Kargil Review Committee, *From Surprise to Reckoning*, p. 27.

⁴² For a description of the setting up of these committees, and their manner of functioning see Standing Committee on Defence, *Twenty Second Report: Review of Implementation Status of Group of Ministers (GoMs) Report on Reforming National Security System in Pursuance to Kargil Review Committee Report—A Special Reference to Management of Defence, 2006-2007* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, July 2007), pp. 1-4.

was led by former minister of state for defence and the lead member of the still-secret Committee on Defence Expenditure (CDE) report, Arun Singh. The task force also included experts with careers in different agencies including MOD, finance ministry and the armed forces. Going beyond the recommendations made by the KRC, the task force had opened terms of reference and an extensive mandate.⁴³ Like the KRC, this task force interviewed a number of retired officials, experts and attended briefings by different agencies.

The Arun Singh committee report has still not been declassified and hence is difficult to critique. However the following account is based on interviews with some members of the committee, journalistic and scholarly accounts and on the basis of the public version of the GOM report which was culled from the main report. At the outset the committee had to deal with two main issues—pace of change and integration of services headquarters with the ministry of defence.

Following the recommendations of the KRC the members of the Arun Singh committee broadly agreed a restructuring of the institutional structure of defence was needed. However, they differed on whether the change should be evolutionary and incremental or revolutionary. After some debate and fearing considerable opposition from entrenched bureaucracies they chose the incremental option. According to one member of the committee, “Arun Singh wanted theatre commands but this was not acceptable right away so he wanted gradual changes.”⁴⁴ At the centrepiece of their reforms was the creation of the CDS post to head the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), creation of a tri-services command at Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) and the Strategic Forces Command (SFC). As discussed later in this paper, however, when the proposal for the CDS position was itself rejected most of the other recommendations lost their rationale.

⁴³ For more about the terms of reference of this committee see Annexure G to the Group of Ministers report, *Reforming the National Security System: Report of the Group of Ministers on National Security* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2001), p. 132.

⁴⁴ Interview with Vice Admiral PS Das, New Delhi, June 24, 2009.

The second issue debated at length by the Arun Singh committee was regarding integration of service headquarters with the ministry of defence.⁴⁵ The three service headquarters have traditionally functioned as attached headquarters to the ministry of defence.⁴⁶ Hence files after being initiated and processed at the service headquarters, underwent the same process at the ministry. Over time this created problems as the military resented their logic being challenged by relatively junior ranking staff at the MOD. Moreover, allegations of a “parallel file system” and delays in processing of files increased resentment within the services.⁴⁷ In time, the narrative internalised within the military was, that they were “not under political control but were under bureaucratic control.”⁴⁸ Interestingly, in mid-1960 the government had apparently proposed to integrate the ministry of defence with the service headquarters but this was rejected by General JN Chaudhuri, who instead argued that “the military should stay away from the civilians.”⁴⁹ Despite debating the issue at length the Arun Singh committee could not come to a definite conclusion. According to one account, civilian bureaucrats on the committee resisted service officers from pushing through this idea of integrating the ministry with the service headquarters.⁵⁰ Instead they argued that serving officers within the ministry would still be beholden to their parent organisations and will

⁴⁵ For the best description of problems arising from this see K. Subrahmanyam, “Higher direction of defence and its organisation,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 11, No. 06, September 1987, pp. 645-658.

⁴⁶ For a historical discussion of this issue see Lieutenant General SK Sinha, *Higher Defence Organisation in India, USI Paper No. 7* (New Delhi: New Statesman Press, 1980), pp. 9-14.

⁴⁷ The parallel file system refers to the practice, usually in the finance department of the Ministry of Defence, to maintain dual files on the same issue. See General VP Malik, *Kargil: From Surprise to Victory* (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2006), p. 358.

⁴⁸ This narrative of bureaucratic instead of political control has largely been internalized within the Indian military. For some typical perspectives see Admiral Arun Prakash, “Keynote Address,” *Proceedings of USI Seminar on Higher Defence Organisation* (New Delhi: United Service Institution of India, 2007), p.10, Air Vice Marshal Kapil Kak, “Direction of Higher Defence II,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 22, No. 4, July 1998, p. 504 and Vinod Anand, *Delhi Papers 16: Joint Vision for the Indian Armed Forces* (New Delhi: IDSA, 2001), p. 86.

⁴⁹ According to one member of the Arun Singh committee Lieutenant General SK Sinha tabled a letter drafted by General JN Chaudhuri rejecting integration of armed forces with the Defence Ministry. Interview, New Delhi, June 24, 2009.

⁵⁰ The committee member, who wishes to remain unnamed, characterized their opposition as “a revolt within the task force”; interview, New Delhi, June 24, 2009.

find it hard to challenge them. Hence, even though the KRC had identified this issue as a major problem, and had recommended locating the service headquarters in the government, the Arun Singh committee instead evolved a system to increase financial powers of the services and integrate them in decision-making committees while retaining a separate civilian component in the ministry of defence.⁵¹ In some ways this represented a compromise between the two opposing viewpoints. However, like most compromises, the issue of integrating service headquarters with the ministry of defence is still alive and is propagated among others by the armed forces and the Parliamentary Standing Committee.⁵²

However, the military's desire for integration between the ministry of defence and service headquarters overlooks a crucial factor— that the current arrangement is expedient for politicians. In other words, politicians prefer to retain a civilian component of the defence ministry which can, in principle, provide a contrarian perspective to proposals emanating from service headquarters and thus maintain systemic 'checks and balances.' Arun Singh believed it was important to retain that arrangement, a view shared by most other members of the committee. According to him:

“there are two broad components to this [civil-military] relationship— those involving the strategic and tactical issues concerning military operations where the advice must come predominantly from the military with the civil service component of MOD providing a historical background and an inter-ministerial view and matters involving issues like acquisitions, personnel, budgeting, and a host of similar issues where the civil MOD inputs can be vital for the political leadership in assessing military advice.”⁵³

At the same time, Arun Singh acknowledged the problems stemming from the lack of specialisation within MOD bureaucrats and hence, ideally, wanted to create a “dedicated civilian national security civil service staff

⁵¹ Kargil Review Committee, *From Surprise to Reckoning*, pp. 258-259.

⁵² See Admiral Arun Prakash, “Divided by Suspicion,” *Force Magazine*, July 2009 and Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Sixth Report: Status of Implementation of Unified Command for Armed Forces* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, February 2009), p. 20.

⁵³ Email from Arun Singh to the author, August 04, 2009 (These are however his personal views and are not reflective of the Arun Singh Committee or its report).

pool from which the ministries of defence/home and other national security entities can be drawn.”⁵⁴ A similar recommendation was made by the NN Vohra task force on internal security.⁵⁵ However till date there is little indication that such a measure will be implemented. The Arun Singh Committee instead recommended a change in the nomenclature of the MOD which was later admitted by officials themselves as having being “merely cosmetic.”⁵⁶ According to K. Subrahmanyam, this problem between the MOD and the service headquarters represents the “basic maladjustment in the Indian system [and] so long as the armed forces is kept out of the government there is a deep malaise.”⁵⁷ Ten years after the Arun Singh committee report the functional relationship between the service headquarters and MOD still remains an issue leading the standing committee on defence to allege that the defence ministry is “apathetic and...avoiding responsibilities.”⁵⁸

In sum both committees played an unprecedented role in initiating a debate and the subsequent restructuring of the Indian military. In doing so they went far beyond any other committee in the past and initiated a debate by publishing some of their main findings. The credit for this must go to the three main architects of security studies and practice in India—K. Subrahmanyam, Jaswant Singh and Arun Singh. However, within a decade the architects would be complaining, both in public and private, about the subversion of their visions.

⁵⁴ Email from Arun Singh to author, August 04, 2009.

⁵⁵ Group of Ministers Report, *Reforming the National Security System*, 2001, paragraph 4.105, p. 56.

⁵⁶ See background note from Ministry of Defence in Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Sixth Report*, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Interview with K. Subrahmanyam, New Delhi, March 30, 2008.

⁵⁸ Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Second Report: [Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations contained in the Twenty-Second Report of the Committee on 'Review of Implementation Status of Group of Ministers Report on Reforming National Security System in pursuance of Kargil Review Committee Report—A Special Reference to Management of Defence]* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, December 2008), p. 4.

Episodic and Erratic: The Reforms Processes

The main recommendations of the KRC and its current implementation status are given in Table 1. Many of the recommendations made by the KRC have been acted upon. However for the most part only those reforms which faced the least bureaucratic resistance have been implemented - either from the armed forces or from civilian agencies. As there is significant overlap between the KRC and the GOM report, the main recommendations of the latter are discussed in Table 2 later in this section.⁵⁹

Table 1: Recommendations and implementation status of the Kargil Review Committee⁶⁰

Recommendation concerning	Main recommendations	Implementation status
1. National Security Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen NSC and have a full time National security adviser (NSA). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both the NSC and NSA have been strengthened over the years.
2. Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance satellite imagery capability and induct unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV's). • Create an organisation focused on electronic and communication intelligence (like the National Security Agency in the United States). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India's first spy satellite launched; ongoing UAV induction. • National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) created in 2004.

⁵⁹ A summary of the recommendations of the KRC as understood by the Group of Ministers (GOM) is listed as annexure B in Group of Ministers Report, *Reforming the National Security System*, pp. 121-123.

⁶⁰ These recommendations have been collated from KRC, *From Surprise to Reckoning*, pp. 252-264.

Recommendation concerning	Main recommendations	Implementation status
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to create an integrated defence intelligence agency (DIA). • Need to give more powers and prominence to the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). • Establish think tanks, invigorate universities and organise exchanges between them and the policy community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DIA created, however it is not integrated • JIC amalgamated into the NSC and given more prominence. • A number of service think tanks established however university and academic exchanges not very successful.
3. Counter-terrorist operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to strengthen and integrate army, Para-military and central police forces. • Reduce the age profile in the army and find ways to decrease the pension bill. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration not very successful and considerable tension remains. • Age profile of the army reduced by implementing AV Singh committee report but pension bill remains a problem.
4. Border management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a committee to study all the issues related in order to have an effective border management policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task force on border management created.
5. Defence budget and modernisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to modernise the military but did not spell out the precise manner to do so. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committees have been formed for optimising defence budget but modernisation plans left to the services.

Recommendation concerning	Main recommendations	Implementation status
6. National security management and apex decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to reorganise the entire gamut of national security management and apex decision-making and the structure and interface between MOD and armed forces headquarters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The KRC recommended integration of the Service Headquarters with the, but the Group of Minister's report only recommended a change in nomenclature of MOD. Consequently interface between the two is still problematic.
7. India's nuclear policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish a White Paper to clearly explain the continuity of India's nuclear weapons program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although a draft nuclear doctrine has been released but white paper not published.
8. Media relations and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create synergy between military and the media. • Publish war histories and declassify official documents to establish the facts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some improvement in mil-media interaction. • War history not published and official documents not declassified.
9. Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a true partnership between DRDO and the services by, among other measures, streamlining procurement policy. • Harness national talent from universities for use in defence industry and research facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement policy has been made clearer over the years, improving interaction between DRDO and services. • Work in progress.

Recommendation concerning	Main recommendations	Implementation status
10. Civil-military liaison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create civil-military liaison mechanisms at various levels, from Command HQ to operational formations on ground to smoothen relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in progress
11. Declaratory policy for Line of Control (LOC).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent cartographic aggression along the Kashmir border, devolve power to settle the Kashmiri agitation and engage in dialogue with Pakistan to seek a larger, long term settlement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LOC has been strengthened. India is attempting, with mixed results, to resolve the agitation and to seek a long term settlement with Pakistan.

Main Reforms that were Implemented

According to most accounts those reforms that were considered ‘benign’ and faced least bureaucratic resistance was easily implemented. Moreover, they were quickly embraced by most stakeholders if they involved the creation of additional posts or organisations and fetched assured budgetary support. For instance, creation of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), Strategic Forces Command (SFC) and the Office of Net Assessment (ONA) —all within the armed forces, were readily accepted and quickly implemented.⁶¹ In time however bureaucratic rivalries,

⁶¹ The exception to this has been the delay in creating the Indian National Defence University (INDU), however the reason for this delay was the objections made by the finance ministry. This was recently given cabinet approval.

institutional incapacity and lack of political will partially subverted the functioning of all of these newly created organisations, as discussed in the next section. Other ‘soft’ recommendations like lowering the age profile of officers (which also enhanced promotion prospects within the military), delegation of financial powers to the armed forces, increased civil-military interaction at the state government level, creation of service specific think-tanks and induction of UAV’s and spy satellites were also accepted and were generally successful.⁶² The emphasis on enhancing the inter-agency processes brought about a cultural change in information sharing within different bureaucracies. As a result, officials within different ministries and agencies, like public sector defence industries, have gone out of their way to engage with the armed forces and vice versa.

One of the most successful areas of reform has been in the streamlining of weapons and equipment procurement policies. The effort to bring clarity in weapons procurement procedures stemmed from frequent scandals that resulted in institutional paralysis and long delays. The reforms in this sector were thus easily acceptable to most bureaucracies. Accordingly the defence procurement procedures were first published in 2003 and guidelines were reissued in 2006. In 2008 the defence procurement procedure for capital procurement was published followed by the revenue procurement procedures in 2009.⁶³ Moreover, the Defence Acquisitions Council (DAC) and a Defence Procurement Board (DPB) were also established to institutionalise the decision-making process. Ironically despite the attempts to ensure the transparency of the weapons procurement process, politically-charged corruption allegations, fear of scandals and policies discouraging private sector participation in the defence industry have delayed the induction of new weapons systems. Since the Bofors scandal and especially after the Tehelka sting operation, weapons procurement by the armed forces has attracted considerable media and political attention. Since then this issue and the allegations of corruption have been used by political parties to drive their agendas. Hence

⁶² For more on the implementation of recommendations made by the Kargil Review Committee see Standing Committee on Defence, *Twenty Second Report* and *Thirty Second Report*.

⁶³ For a link to all these revised procedures see Ministry of Defence website: <http://mod.nic.in/dpm/welcome.html>

in 2004 when the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) came to power it referred 48 arms deals for corruption investigations.⁶⁴ This form of ‘witch-hunting’ has paralysed decision-making as officials became increasingly fearful of getting embroiled in investigations and possible litigation. Tellingly, in recent years a number of arms deals and their dealers have come under the corruption scanner affecting force modernisation plans.⁶⁵ Moreover the government policies towards private sector participation in defence industry—domestic or foreign, prevent the emergence of a vibrant alternative to state run enterprises.⁶⁶ As a result the Indian military is beholden to government run domestic industry whose performance is still a matter of some debate.⁶⁷

Reforms not Implemented

There are three main recommendations which were not implemented by the government: The first and perhaps the most important was the creation of the post of chief of defence staff (CDS). While this issue has been historically contentious, the Arun Singh committee recommended creating a CDS as “the COSC [Chiefs of Staff Committee] has not been effective in fulfilling its mandate.”⁶⁸ This recommendation was accepted by the Group of Ministers and included in their report. The CDS was supposed to carry out four functions—provide single-point military advice, administer strategic (read nuclear) forces, enhance planning process

⁶⁴ Vineet Khare, “CBI has proof linking George to arms dealers,” *Tehelka*, October 21, 2006.

⁶⁵ A number of arms deals have been cancelled and their dealers blacklisted see Radhakrishna Rao, “Indian Defence Deals: Cleaning the Augean Stables,” *IPCS Article No. 2910*, July 17, 2009 and Manu Pubby, “One FIR, Govt. blacklists 7 firms, hits artillery upgrade,” *Indian Express*, June 06, 2009.

⁶⁶ See S.K. Singh, “Paying for India’s Defence Policies,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2011.

⁶⁷ For a critical audit of the DRDO’s performance see the 8 part *exposé* in the *Indian Express* by Shiv Aroor and Amitav Ranjan, November 11-19, 2006 and a 6-part special series by George Iype, “Chinks in the armour,” *Rediff.com*, March 2000. For a contrarian view see 3 part series by Kaushik Kapisthalam, “DRDO: A Stellar success,” *Rediff.com*, January 2005. Also see Laxman Kumar Behera, “India’s Defence Public Sector Undertakings: A Performance Analysis,” *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 3, No.4, October 2009, pp. 118-130 and Mrinal Suman, “Private Sector in Defence production,” *Indian Defence Review*, Vol. 22, Issue 3, September 2007.

⁶⁸ Group of Ministers, *Reforming the National Security System*, p. 100; for a historical discussion on the debate surrounding the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) position see Jerrold F. Elkin and W. Andrew Ritezal, “The Debate on Restructuring India’s Higher Defence Organisation,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 10 (October, 1984), pp. 1069-1085.

through inter and intra service prioritisation and to ensure ‘jointness’ [integration] in the armed forces. However, while the BJP government was incrementally taking steps to appoint a CDS they faced opposition from different quarters. Unsurprisingly, the fiercest resistance was from within the services, especially the air force.⁶⁹ Historically, the Indian air force has had the fear of being dominated by the much-larger army and has devised ways to maintain its own identity and autonomy. Their prolonged but ultimately futile opposition to the creation of army and naval aviation wings also created much bitterness within the services.⁷⁰ In an attempt to build consensus, Arun Singh convened a meeting of seventeen former chiefs of staff of the services along with members of his committee. However, according to one participant, this meeting ended in a “fiasco” with eleven chiefs in favour and six against.⁷¹ Tellingly, all six opposed to this measure were from the air force. Meanwhile, a number of former air chief marshals publicly opposed this measure and wrote letters against it to the president and prominent political leaders.⁷² As a result of their lobbying combined with fears about a loss of autonomy, Air Chief Marshal Tipnis came out publicly against the creation of the CDS.⁷³

There was opposition to the CDS from two other significant lobbies—civilian bureaucracies and political parties. The former feared that appointing a CDS would create a powerful position that might, at least in theory, dominate the MOD *and* the cabinet secretary. This they feared would diminish their power. Among political parties, the main opposition came from the Congress-dominated United Progressive Alliance (UPA). But despite their opposition the stage was apparently set for appointing the CDS when India’s highest deliberative body on security, the CCS, met on May 11, 2001 to discuss the GOM report. However, Prime Minister

⁶⁹ For more on the justifications made by the Air Force to oppose the CDS see Shishir Gupta, “Down to Brasstacks,” *India Today*, May 28, 2001.

⁷⁰ See General Vijay Oberoi (ed.), *Indian Army Aviation 2025* (New Delhi: Knowledge World Publishers, 2007).

⁷¹ Interview with member of the Arun Singh Committee, New Delhi, June 24, 2009.

⁷² See Major General Ashok Mehta, “The CDS controversy deepens,” *Rediff News*, August 30, 2001.

⁷³ See John Cherian, “In Defence of Changes,” *Frontline*, Vol. 18, No. 19, September 15-28, 2001.

Vajpayee while accepting all the other recommendations refused to sanction the creation of the CDS post.⁷⁴ Instead it was decided that the decision will be taken after “consulting with other political parties”—delaying the implementation indefinitely. Prime Minister Vajpayee’s decision in turn was shaped by inputs from other political luminaries, most notably former President Venkatraman.⁷⁵ Their suggestion was not to create a CDS post and to resist tampering with the system. This in turn was shaped by the Congress party’s historical fear of a single, powerful military commander or an empowered military. Thus, a combination of infighting among the services and the fears shared by both the bureaucrats and politicians prevented the implementation of this recommendation. Currently, the position of the MOD on this issue is that concurrence from political parties is still awaited.⁷⁶ Curiously, other than four unnamed parties, none of the other parties have communicated their position on this issue.⁷⁷

The second unimplemented recommendation that was made by both the KRC and the GOM was regarding publication of war history and declassification. While seemingly a minor matter the lack of declassification from ‘sensitive’ ministries like defence, home and external affairs post-independence has created two major problems. First, there is an ‘absence of history’ within most organisations under these ministries. For instance, most of India’s wars are mired in controversies that can seemingly be resolved by opening up archives.⁷⁸ More ominously, there is little introspection and dissemination of lessons learnt which leads to a

⁷⁴ Inder Malhotra, “CDS a pipedream: Abandon the futile debate,” *The Tribune*, September 21, 2007.

⁷⁵ Inder Malhotra, “Appointment of CDS brooks no delay,” *The Hindu*, May 23, 2001. Earlier, in 1983 Venkatraman as a Defence Minister had opposed the creation of the Chief of Defence Staff which was argued by then army chief General KV Krishna Rao, see Jerrold F. Elkin and W. Andrew Ritzel, “The Debate on Restructuring India’s Higher Defence Organisation,” p. 1069.

⁷⁶ See statement from MOD official in the Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty-Sixth Report*, p. 5

⁷⁷ See Parliament of India, *Lok Sabha Unstarred Question Number 302*, October 20, 2008, <http://164.100.47.132/psearch/QResult14.aspx?qref=66576>

⁷⁸ See Anit Mukherjee, “Generals and their stories...,” *Indian Express*, June 07, 2007 and “Tell it like it is,” *Times of India*, June 09, 2010.

relearning of lessons.⁷⁹ Second, by not declassifying any records, expertise on these issue areas—defence, policing and diplomacy, remains restricted to former officials of these organisations. Part of the problem is a lack of capacity within these institutions to declassify historical records. Absent resources and a dedicated team to declassify records the easiest recourse for these organisations is to deny information by citing the Official Secrets Act. This has three outcomes. First, organisational myths and narratives are rarely challenged. Second, bureaucrats in these ministries (especially defence and home) rarely possess the knowledge to challenge the logic and assumptions made by the military and police respectively. Finally, there is a disconnect between academia and policy-making.⁸⁰ To bridge the gap between the study and practice of national security both the reform committees had recommended the establishment of an Indian National Defence University (INDU). This project was delayed due to an inter-ministerial dispute between the finance and defence ministries and was only recently approved by the cabinet.⁸¹ However in the absence of declassification the efficacy of INDU is itself suspect.

The final recommendation made by the GOM, that was not acted upon, was regarding the composition of the pay commission. The pay commission is a panel of members appointed by the government of India that recommends pay scales of government employees and is convened every decade or so. Correctly identifying anomalies in previous pay commissions to be a cause of tension between military officers and civilian bureaucrats, the GOM recommended that: “all future central pay commissions should have a senior retired “defence adviser” to be nominated by the defence minister based on the recommendations made by the CDS/defence secretary.”⁸² However, when the sixth pay commission was being convened the MOD justified the need to do away with this and argued that “there was no need for appointment of an Adviser as the Commission would give full opportunity to the armed forces to place

⁷⁹ See Anit Mukherjee, “India’s Experience with Insurgency and Counterinsurgency,” in Sumit Ganguly, Andrew Scobell and Joseph Liow (eds.), *Handbook of Asian Security*, (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁸⁰ Group of Ministers Report, *Reforming the National Security System*, p. 114.

⁸¹ See Rajat Pandit, “Finally, India to get a national defence university,” *Times of India*, May 13, 2010.

⁸² Group of Ministers Report, *Reforming the National Security System*, p. 114.

their views before the Commission.”⁸³ While seemingly a minor matter, the non-inclusion of a defence adviser directly contributed to the subsequent controversy over the composition, terms and recommendations made by the sixth pay commission in 2008-09. The initial report of the sixth pay commission caused widespread dissatisfaction within the armed forces and triggered, arguably, one of the biggest crises in civil-military relations after the 1962 India-China war.⁸⁴ In a rare act of solidarity, the three service chiefs made a joint representation protesting against some ‘anomalies’ in the pay commission to the defence minister and later the prime minister.⁸⁵ Moreover, in making their displeasure known, the service chiefs refused to implement a cabinet order on the pay commission leading one analyst to comment that “for the first time, these incumbents [service chiefs] have stood in defiance of civil authority as no military chiefs have ever done in India’s history.”⁸⁶ As a result of the subsequent media storm, the prime minister appointed a special committee under Pranab Mukherjee to examine the issue. Meanwhile the chief of naval staff Admiral Sureesh Mehta clarified that “the issue is not about money...it is about status and equivalence that existed [before the pay commission], and the command and control relationship [between the armed forces officers and their civilian counterparts].”⁸⁷ His remarks captured accurately the heart of the matter—the divide and resentment between civilian bureaucrats and military personnel. While the committee’s report and its implementation resolved some of issues, the bitterness remained. In sum, the failure to implement the GOM recommendation combined with political mismanagement and a lack of leadership created an avoidable crisis. This episode only served to highlight and bring into public domain the civil-military divide in India.

⁸³ See letter from ministry of Defence reproduced in Standing Committee on Defence, *Fifteenth Report: Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations contained in the Eleventh report of the Committee (Fourteenth Lok Sabha) on the Demands for Grants of the Ministry of Defence for the year 2006-07* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, April 2007), p. 89.

⁸⁴ It was for the first time that the three service chiefs made a joint representation to the defence minister and then the prime minister. For more on this see Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar, “Anomalies in armed forces pay revision,” *The Hindu*, October 20, 2008, General VP Malik, “Defensible, not Defiance,” *Indian Express*, October 07, 2008.

⁸⁵ See P. Sunderarajan, “Defence staff agree to new pay for now,” *The Hindu*, September 28, 2008.

⁸⁶ Shekhar Gupta, “Chain of command, demand,” *Indian Express*, October 04, 2008.

⁸⁷ See “It’s about status and equality, not money: Navy chief,” *Indian Express*, October 04, 2008.

Reforms ‘Imperfectly’ Implemented

When the Arun Singh Committee submitted its report to him, the then defence minister Jaswant Singh issued an instruction to re-examine the reforms after five years.⁸⁸ This was done to cater for unintended consequences and to institutionalise the reform process. However, the UPA government did not give this the priority it required and instead of constituting another committee of experts, this task was taken up by the parliament’s Standing Committee on Defence. Accordingly, three reports (Report number 22, 32 and 36) focused solely on the implementation of post-Kargil defence reforms and involved testimonies from MOD officials, military officers and numerous official and non-official experts. These reports mainly suggest that most of the recommendations made by the KRC and the Arun Singh Committee have been implemented.⁸⁹ At the same time, acknowledging that there is a need to revisit the reform process, the Standing Committee on Defence suggested that there is a need to establish a “high powered expert committee to reorganise, reform and restructure the armed forces.”⁹⁰ Indeed, on four major issues the reforms have been ‘imperfectly’ implemented, and often subverted.

The first issue concerns integration among the three services, which is often referred to in India as ‘jointness.’ Both the KRC and the GOM remarked on the absence of synergy between the services and the latter recommended the CDS position to deal with this problem. This assumed a top-down approach to integration and when the CDS recommendation was rejected, according to a former chairman of the chiefs of staffs secretariat, “ripped the heart out of the GOM recommendations.”⁹¹ Historically integration within the Indian armed forces has been problematic and has effected most of India’s post-independence wars.⁹² The Indian air force (IAF), perhaps because it is the only service that

⁸⁸ Email communication with a member of the Arun Singh committee, July 29, 2009.

⁸⁹ Especially see appendix to Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Second Report*, 2008, p. 43.

⁹⁰ Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Sixth Report*, p. v.

⁹¹ Admiral Arun Prakash, “India’s Higher Defence Organisation: Implications for National Security and Jointness,” *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 1, No.1, August 2007, p. 24.

⁹² See Vice Admiral PS Das, “Jointness in India’s Military— What it is and what is must be,” *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 1, No.1, August 2007, pp. 1-12.

operationally interfaces with the other services, has traditionally opposed the form of integration espoused by the army and the navy.⁹³ Air force officers, on their part, fear a loss of operational control and the danger that they will be relegated to play the role of a supporting service. Their allegedly obstructionist attitude has created a divide with the army and the navy on one side and the air force on the other. Unsurprisingly then, intellectual debates about integration in India reflect this divide between the services. For instance, in 2007 IDSA launched a flagship journal devoted exclusively to the study of defence issues—the *Journal of Defence Studies*. Its inaugural issue focused on ‘jointness’, but consisted of articles written exclusively by former army and naval officers.⁹⁴ The air force perspective, and some would argue, support for ‘jointness’ was conspicuous by its absence. It was only in the next issue that a former air force officer presented that view which dissented in both tone and content.⁹⁵

The absence of integration creates three main problems. First, obviously, it hampers operational planning within the Indian military. The Indian army’s ‘Cold Start’ doctrine best exemplifies the consequences of a failure to agree upon a common operational plan.⁹⁶ This doctrine has been through many changes since it was first evolved in 2002 to settle upon the current “hit, mobilise, hit harder” styled operations.⁹⁷ One of its biggest weaknesses and a point of dispute between army and air force planners concerns close air support (CAS). Ideally, the army prefers CAS during the initial stages of the limited offensive. However, the air force could not guarantee this mission as their priority was to attain air superiority

⁹³ Due to limited operational engagement between the army and the navy, there is very little disagreement between them.

⁹⁴ See *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol.1, No.1, August 2007.

⁹⁵ See Air Marshal Vinod Patney, “Jointness in Armed Forces and Institution of Post of Chief of Defence Staff are Mutually Exclusive,” *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol.2, No.1, Summer 2008, pp. 31-39.

⁹⁶ The ‘Cold Start’ doctrine refers to the Indian army plan to wage a limited war under a nuclear umbrella. See Walter Ladwig, “A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army’s New Limited War Doctrine,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Winter 2007/08), pp. 158-190.

⁹⁷ See Sandeep Unnithan, “Fast and Furious,” *India Today*, March 27, 2008. However interviews with serving officers suggest that this strategy is constantly evolving with the introduction of new technologies and capabilities.

and strategic interdiction. As a result of their continued disagreement, the army proposed a plan for induction of fixed wing aircraft and heavy lift helicopters. Alarmed at this development which threatened to undercut the monopoly of the air force, their planners have now belatedly added Battlefield Air Interdiction (BAI) to their mission plans.⁹⁸ Due to these differences, some of it perhaps unavoidable, the services largely continue to plan and train for their own individual battles.⁹⁹ In fact even communication links between the three services are problematic and reveal a lack of interoperability.¹⁰⁰ The second problem caused by an absence of integration is the financial implication of logistical duplication and separate procurement channels.¹⁰¹ As the services have evolved their own organisations for logistical functions, they are reluctant to integrate and perhaps lose control over them. Similarly, complex procurement policies and information asymmetries result in financial losses in procuring similar equipment by different services. Admittedly, this problem has been recognised and efforts have been made in the defence procurement procedures to evolve Joint Services Quality Requirement (JSQR). However, for the most part, the problem still remains.¹⁰² Finally, the perpetuation of single-service thinking has led to a sociological and cultural divide between the three services. While it is important to maintain their individual identity, there are few instances where the services actually work together.¹⁰³ Moreover, none of the operational and training commands of the three

⁹⁸ This account is based on numerous interviews with serving officers, New Delhi, August 2009.

⁹⁹ A number of exercises were held showcasing the new 'jointness' within the services like Exercise Brazen Chariots conducted in March 2008. However, for the most part, there is very little coordination between army field formations and air force assets, see Major General DS Chauhan, "Implementing Jointmanship in the Indian Armed Forces," *The Purple Pages*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, February 2007, pp.24.

¹⁰⁰ See Vinod Anand, *Joint Vision for the Indian Armed Forces*, pp. 37-39.

¹⁰¹ For more on this see Vinod Anand, "Integrating the Indian Military: Retrospect and Prospect," *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 2, No.2, Winter 2008, pp. 30-33.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, pp. 31-32.

¹⁰³ It is in the newly created commands—Andaman and Nicobar Command, Strategic Forces Command and Integrated Defence Staff and some training institutions that personnel from the three services work together. However recently there has been a pilot project to cross-post officers to the Operations and Logistics directorate of the three services. (Interview with serving officer, August 03, 2009).

services are co-located even though they share the same operational area.¹⁰⁴ To enhance coordination the Indian air force has established forward air commands but they are a poor substitute. As a result there is a lack of social interaction that perpetuates this divide.

The second issue created by an ‘imperfect implementation’ of the reforms is the functioning of the newly created organisations— Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC).¹⁰⁵ The IDS, missing the masthead of the CDS position, is frequently ignored and often bypassed by the individual services and even by different ministries, like home and external affairs.¹⁰⁶ According to former chief of army staff General Padmanabhan, who was closely involved in the implementation of the GOM reforms, “the entire effort in creating an Integrated Defence Staff is, as of now, an exercise in futility... [and] is yet another example of redundancy in military bureaucracy.”¹⁰⁷ Government officials continue to defend the functioning of the IDS even without the CDS position and justify it as an “incremental process.”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the MOD is trying to increase the importance of the IDS by forcing service headquarters to work through it. This, in turn, increases the resentment in the different services as they feel threatened by IDS overseeing their acquisition, force structure and budgetary plans. IDS officers themselves aver to the benefits of inter-services integration that stems from their efforts including common financial, budgeting and accountability norms, clarity in the procurement procedures, formulation of joint doctrines and steps taken for finalising the defence capability

¹⁰⁴ The Indian armed forces have a total of 17 Commands, and with the exception of the joint Strategic Forces Command and the Andaman and Nicobar Command, none of service commands are in the same location. See Admiral Arun Prakash, “Keynote Address,” *Proceedings of USI Seminar on Higher Defence Organisation* (New Delhi: United Service Institution of India, 2007), p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ In addition the Strategic Forces Command (SFC) was also created to handle nuclear weapons but as there is little public information about this organisation, I have deliberately excluded it from this study.

¹⁰⁶ The following account is based on interviews with serving officials in army HQ and in the IDS, New Delhi, July-August 2009.

¹⁰⁷ General S. Padmanabhan, *A General Speaks* (Manas Publications: New Delhi, 2005), pp. 35.

¹⁰⁸ See letters from Ministry of Defence reproduced in Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Second Report*, pp. 28-29 and *Thirty Sixth Report*, pp. 4-5.

plan. However, even they admit that the services are deliberately undercutting their power by, among other means, posting officers with limited promotion prospects.¹⁰⁹

The DIA established primarily for “coordinating the functioning of different service intelligence directorates”¹¹⁰ is also facing considerable opposition from various service and other intelligence agencies. According to Lieutenant General Kamal Davar, the founder of DIA, the respective service intelligence agencies especially the army’s military intelligence wing “felt threatened by the DIA.”¹¹¹ Moreover, the Arun Singh Committee had recommended integration of the functional desks of the service intelligence wings into the DIA while, simultaneously, retaining the wings for protocol purposes.¹¹² In other words, service intelligence desks working on common thematic topics—regional or functional, would integrate while the services would retain their intelligence super-structures for interaction with other militaries and other such purposes. However the services were unwilling to part with their intelligence assets and as a result the DIA has only resulted in a duplication of reports and the creation of an additional layer of bureaucracy. However, the DIA has been successful in creating new organisations, lending credence to the argument made earlier—that reforms that resulted in bureaucratic expansion were readily implemented. For instance, new organisations like the Defence Image Processing and Analysis Centre (DIPAC) and the Defence Information Warfare Agency (DIWA) were placed under DIA.¹¹³

Similarly the ANC—symbolically the flagship of integration and the first unified command, has major administrative and operational issues. Administratively the three services operate under their own logistical and budgeting systems despite serving in the same command. Legally the

¹⁰⁹ This point is debateable but many officers are shunted out to IDS by their parent organisation.

¹¹⁰ Group of Ministers Report, *Reforming the National Security System*, pp. 104.

¹¹¹ Interview, New Delhi, June 19, 2009.

¹¹² Interview with Vice Admiral PS Das, member of the Arun Singh Committee, New Delhi, June 24, 2009.

¹¹³ See Air Marshal Narayan Menon, “Downhill from Kargil,” *Indian Defence Review*, Vol. 24, Issue 3, July-September 2009, p.116.

services operate under their respective military acts creating problems of command and control. Efforts are on to create a combined Armed Forces Act but a lack of consensus among the services is proving to be problematic.¹¹⁴ Operationally, problems in the ANC relate to two main issues. The first is with respect to command and control over service assets. When it was founded, at least on paper, the three services were committed to the idea of a combined command. However, problems soon cropped up over transfer of land, commitment of resources and control of assets.¹¹⁵ For instance, the Commander-in-Chief Andaman and Nicobar Command (CINCAN) has little say in the allotment of resources to his command as this is done by the respective services. The second problem relates to civilian support staff in the ANC. According to the parliament's standing committee report, there is a 90 per cent deficiency in the staffing of civilian posts in the ANC mainly because "nobody wants to go there."¹¹⁶

Besides these newly created organisations, there were a number of other new organisations including Defence Acquisition Council, Defence Procurement Board, Defence Production Board and Defence Research and Development Board. While examining all of them is beyond the scope of this paper, the parliamentary standing committee on defence felt the need to do so in making the following recommendation:

"The Committee, feel that there is an urgent need to review the working of all these organisations set up by the Ministry of Defence on the basis of recommendations made by GoM. The Committee desire [*sic*] that a team of experts should examine the actual working of each and every organisation to ensure their efficient working and also to have synergy."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ For a historical perspective of this issue see Colonel Indra Sen Singh, "Uniform Code of Military Justice: Need of the Day," *The Purple Pages*, Vol.1, Issue 2, February 2007, pp. 92-97.

¹¹⁵ See Rajat Pandit, "Strategic Andaman and Nicobar command floundering with low force-levels," *The Times of India*, July 24, 2009, also see Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Sixth Report*, p.7.

¹¹⁶ See Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Sixth Report*, p. 14.

¹¹⁷ See letter from the Ministry of Defence in the Standing Committee on Defence, *Twenty Second Report*, p. 19.

In response to this the MOD rather self-servingly, argued that “it is considered that the efficacy of these institutions and organisations may be reviewed by MOD.”¹¹⁸ While this stance was subsequently censured by the standing committee, the functioning of these newly created organisations remains a problem.

The final problem with ‘imperfect implementation’ has been in the field of defence planning.¹¹⁹ The GOM report, more so than the KRC, while examining defence planning felt that there was a need to improve the interagency and budgetary processes. Despite some positive changes, however, there are three main problems in the planning process. First is with respect to the formulation of long-term plans. The GOM had recommended the formulation of a national security doctrine, Defence Minister’s Directive, Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) and the Joint Services Plan.¹²⁰ Despite this recommendation the government is yet to formulate a national security strategy although this was promised by December 2009.¹²¹ Even the defence minister’s directive that is supposed to “form the conceptual basis for the defence plan”¹²² and the LTIPP have not been formulated.¹²³ Moreover, to bring all agencies on board and in the interests of transparency there is a need to release a public version of these documents. In fact the Kelkar committee, established to examine and recommend changes in acquisition procedures and to enable greater participation of private sector in defence production, recommended releasing a public version of the military perspective plans—something the MOD has accepted in principle but has not yet delivered.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ See Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Second Report*, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ For an introduction to this topic see VP Malik and Vinod Anand, (eds.), *Defence Planning: Problems and Prospects* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2006).

¹²⁰ See Group of Ministers Report, *Reforming the National Security System*, p.98 and 107-108.

¹²¹ See Standing Committee of Defence, *Sixteenth Report: Demand for Grants, 2007-2008* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, April 2007) pp. 46-48 and Vinod Anand, “Integrating the Indian Military,” p. 23.

¹²² Group of Ministers Report, *Reforming the National Security System*, p. 108.

¹²³ See Standing Committee on Defence, *Sixteenth Report*, p. 46.

¹²⁴ See Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Third Report: Indigenization of Defence Production-Public Private Partnership* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, December 2008), p. 75.

The second problem with defence planning has been over the lack of coordination between the ministries of defence and finance, especially over timely clearances of plans by the latter. This problem has traditionally plagued defence planning in India and, in fact, “from 1985 to 1996-97, covering ten annual defence budgets, there was no approved Five-Year Plan for defence.”¹²⁵ Even after the reform process was initiated in 2002, there were major funding problems in the tenth defence plan, which was approved only in its last year, and the eleventh plan (2007-12) has still not got the approval of the finance ministry.¹²⁶ Finally, defence planning in India suffers from a lack of inter-service prioritisation and overall integration. In the absence of the CDS position, integrated plans (LTIPP) are usually driven by consensus among the service chiefs perforce making it an amalgamation of respective service plans.¹²⁷ According to one former chairman of the COSC, “commenting on the acquisition plan of the other service was considered taboo and, as a result, the integrated plan was a bundle of all our plans.”¹²⁸ In fact, according to a former army officer closely involved with the defence planning process, the absence of prioritisation and integration is cited as an excuse by finance ministry officials for not clearing defence plans in time.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ AK Ghosh, *Defence Budgeting and Planning in India: The Way Forward* (New Delhi: Knowledge World Publishers, 2006), p. 224.

¹²⁶ For problems with the Tenth defence plan see AK Ghosh, “Budgeting for Desired Defence Capability,” *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol.2, No.2, Winter 2008, pp. 48-49; for non-finalization of the Eleventh defence plan see Standing Committee on Defence, *Sixteenth Report*, p. 48.

¹²⁷ For more on this see Admiral VS Shekhawat, “Challenges in Defence Planning,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 30, No.4, October-December 2006, pp. 698- 701.

¹²⁸ Interview with Admiral Arun Prakash, New Delhi, June 27, 2009.

¹²⁹ Interview with senior officer who wishes to remain unnamed, New Delhi, June 29, 2009.

Why have Defence Reforms not Worked?

Despite official statements claiming that most of the recommendations made by the KRC and the GOM have been successfully implemented, many strategic analysts disagree.¹³⁰ According to General VP Malik, “although in terms of numbers, most of these reforms are stated to have been implemented many changes have only been cosmetic.”¹³¹ Admiral Arun Prakash who besides being a member of the Arun Singh Committee oversaw many of the reforms as the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, noted that “at the macro level, the fact remained that we had travelled to what was merely, a ‘half-way house’, and this had in many ways made things worse for the armed forces.”¹³² Satish Chandra in a scathing critique wrote that “the bureaucracy on its part has, in the implementation of security reforms approved at the highest level in government, been at best dilatory and at worst obstructive. Turf battles have also taken their toll in slowing down or even completely blocking reform.”¹³³ Indeed, as discussed in the course of this paper, many of the reforms have been cursorily implemented. Table 2 lists the main recommendations made by the GOM. Instead of tabulating all of them the recommendations are divided into three categories— those that were implemented, those not implemented and those implemented ‘imperfectly’. Admittedly, the last category invites the risk of being normative; however this is largely unavoidable as a number of officials interviewed often alluded to the ‘imperfect’ manner in which some reforms were implemented.

¹³⁰ See Statements made by Ministry of Defence officials in Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Second Report*.

¹³¹ General V P Malik, “The Kargil war: Some Reflections,” *Claws Journal*, Summer 2009, pp. 14-15.

¹³² Admiral Arun Prakash, “India’s Higher Defence Organisation,” *Journal of Defence Studies*, vol.1 No.1, 2007, p. 25.

¹³³ Satish Chandra, “National Security System and Reform,” in Satish Kumar (ed.), *India’s National Security: Annual Review 2005* (New Delhi: Knowledge World Publishers, 2005), pp. 223-224.

Table 2: Main Recommendations of the Group of Ministers on Management of Defence

Recommendations imperfectly implemented	Recommendations that were implemented	Recommendations not implemented
<p>1. Functioning of tri-services organisations like IDS, ANC and DIA.</p> <p>2. Overall integration and jointness within the Indian armed forces.</p> <p>3. Defence planning procedures.</p>	<p>1. Creation of additional tri-services organisations like IDS, ANC, DIA, ONA and SFC.</p> <p>2. Increased transparency in weapons procurement process.</p> <p>3. Lowering of age profile of officers, done by implementing A.V. Singh Committee report.</p> <p>4. Delegation of financial powers to armed forces headquarters and field formations.</p> <p>5. Increased civil-military interaction and overall interagency co-ordination.</p> <p>6. Creation of think-tanks</p> <p>7. Induction of UAV's and spy satellites. security adviser (NSA).</p>	<p>1. Creation of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) position.</p> <p>2. Publication of war histories and declassification</p> <p>3. Non-inclusion of military representative in the pay commission.</p>

This ‘imperfect implementation’ of defence reforms, in turn, can be attributed to three factors— deliberate subversion, inherent incapacity and growing pangs. The first, deliberate subversion should not be construed as malicious but rather a function of “bureaucratic politics.”¹³⁴ Simply put, bureaucracies—both uniformed and civilian, have opposed policies that would have resulted in a loss of power and resources. Hence the initial opposition of the air force to the CDS position which, ironically, was later mirrored by the army chief, JJ Singh, can be explained, because they felt that this would diminish their powers.¹³⁵ Similarly, problems with the DIA and reluctance on the part of the services to give up their powers to the IDS can also be thus understood. This ‘subversion’ is carried out in a number of ways. The most obvious is to deny resources and power to the newly created organisations. Next is by treating them as a “dumping ground” in terms of staffing, thus making them an unattractive career choice. Hence many of the officers posted in these organisations are shunted out of mainstream career paths and their directives largely ignored. The civilian posts at these organisations too are either understaffed or considered unattractive.¹³⁶

The ‘incapacity’ factor argues that problems persist due to the structural reasons. For instance, integration would remain a distant ideal due to the inherent differences among the three services on threat perspectives, mission objectives, force structures and operational plans. More tellingly, difficulties in defence planning persist because of the incapacity of the MOD and the defence minister to formulate plans independent of the service HQs. Hence, lacking the capacity and the expertise to arbitrate or question on operational grounds the demands of the three services, the MOD accepts the ‘bundled up’ plans made by the respective service HQs. Similarly, defence planning continues to remain ‘imperfect’ because the

¹³⁴ For more on this see Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, 1971) and James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (Basic Books, 1989).

¹³⁵ For General JJ Singh’s reversal of the army’s institutional position on this issue see Rajat Pandit, “Armed Forces not ready for a Chief of Defence Staff: JJ Singh,” *Times of India*, August 27, 2007. The service chiefs feel threatened by the CDS position and this explains their opposition.

¹³⁶ See Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Sixth report*, pp. 14-15.

finance ministry is unable to guarantee assured support due to their budgeting constraints and system.

Finally, the most charitable perspective, that the problems with implementation of reforms are perhaps unavoidable and are teething troubles. Moreover, as a result of organisational learning, there are incremental changes being made that will ultimately contribute to the achieving of larger goals. Hence, recent efforts to create an armed forces act and increase the power of the IDS can be seen in this light. Indeed there is an intellectual emphasis on 'jointness' in military schools of instruction and professional journals.¹³⁷ Many among the serving officials—civilians and military feel that integration is just a matter of time. Significantly, however, there is little agreement on the roadmap to integration.

Civil-Military Relations in India

While bureaucratic politics can explain many of the problems afflicting defence reforms in India, there is a larger paradigm. Many of these issues can be understood by examining the unique structure and functioning of civil-military relations in India. Other democracies have dealt with similar issues, with mixed results to be sure, by making changes in their higher defence organisations. Civil-military relations, which shape these higher defence organisations, in India have three main characteristics—a tradition of non-interference in defence issues by politicians, lack of bureaucratic expertise and considerable autonomy enjoyed by the three services over their own affairs.

Politicians, while careful to uphold the principle of civilian control, rarely interfere in defence matters in India.¹³⁸ While they maybe interested in

¹³⁷ For instance the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) has launched its own journal *The Purple Pages* and established think tank (CENJOWS); moreover recent articles in Indian defence journals indicate an increasing acceptance and necessity for enhancing integration. See *Pinnacle*, *Combat*, *USI Journal*, *Trishul*, etc.

¹³⁸ The principle of upholding civilian control is best epitomized by the sacking of Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat in 1999 and the controversy over comments made by the then army chief, General Rodrigues in 1994, see Sunil Dasgupta, "India: The New Militaries," pp. 111-113 and Samina Ahmed, "Civil-Military Relations in India," *Regional Studies*, Vol. 10, Issue 3 (Summer 1992), pp. 39-41.

defence affairs, and frequent questions in parliament testify to that, they rarely intervene as a matter of principle. This, in turn, is due to two factors. First is the historical precedence set by the disastrous 1962 India-China war which was attributed largely to misguided political interference and the “higher direction of war” or lack thereof.¹³⁹ The conventional wisdom on the debacle blames Prime Minister Nehru and specifically Defence Minister Krishna Menon for leaving the army unprepared, reposing faith in ‘political’ officers and provoking China by advocating a militarily unfeasible ‘forward policy.’¹⁴⁰ While this perspective has recently been challenged, the lessons from the episode were deeply internalised by both the political and military classes.¹⁴¹ Moreover, this arrangement was seemingly justified when General Manekshaw ‘stood up’ to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi while planning the 1971 Bangladesh operations.¹⁴² The success of that campaign helped cement what has since become an important organisational narrative within the Indian armed forces—military officers should resist political pressure while planning and conducting operations. These incidents and their narratives also made it inexpedient and risky for politicians to interfere in matters considered to be in the military’s domain. The second reason for political non-interference is the lack of expertise in defence affairs outside the armed forces. In the first place very few parliamentarians have a background in the military.¹⁴³ More crucially, there is little expertise even in the civilian

¹³⁹ According to some reports, the Henderson-Brooks committee which was tasked to investigate the conduct of the war blamed it on the “higher direction of war.” See Steven A. Hoffman, *India and the China crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 222, D.R. Mankekar, *The Guilty Men of 1962* (Bombay: Tulsi Shah Enterprises, 1968), pp. 80-84, Neville Maxwell, *India’s China war* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), p. 438.

¹⁴⁰ For more on the ‘Forward policy’ see Rajesh Rajagopalan, “Re-Examining the ‘Forward Policy,’” in P.R.Kumaraswamy (ed.), *Security Beyond Survival: Essays for K. Subrahmanyam* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), pp. 103-126.

¹⁴¹ For a counter argument to the lack of the military’s inputs in shaping the ‘forward policy’ see Srinath Raghavan, “Civil-Military Relations in India: The China Crisis and After,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 149-175.

¹⁴² See Pupul Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi: A Biography* (New Delhi: Penguin India Books, 1992), p. 223.

¹⁴³ The only prominent soldier-politician in recent times, Mr. Jaswant Singh, while serving as defence minister was instrumental in pushing through many reforms despite bureaucratic opposition.

domain, either academic or in policy circles, for politicians to benefit from. Both these factors are also exacerbated by a sociological divide between the political and military classes. As defence issues have very little electoral impact (except in cases of clear cut victories or failures), most politicians give them little attention in comparison to other electoral relevant sectors like education, healthcare, anti-poverty schemes, etc. The military too—in an effort to maintain its apolitical image—has shunned reaching out to the political class. As a result, according to a former chief of naval Staff, “we do not really understand each other and often are wary of each other. By the time trust is built up, it’s usually too late to do anything substantial.”¹⁴⁴

The second major characteristic of Indian civil-military relations is a lack of bureaucratic expertise in defence affairs. At the time of independence, India inherited the generalist system of administration from the British in the form of the Indian Civil Service (ICS). Later renamed as the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), it has been referred to as the ‘steel frame’ of India, consisting of a cadre of bureaucrats who effectively administer India. However, this cadre is composed of generalists who are rotated between different ministries and other administrative positions. This generalist system of administration has had an impact on the functioning of most Indian public institutions.¹⁴⁵ Recognising this problem numerous administrative reforms committees have recommended creating functional fields of specialisation but these have not been implemented.¹⁴⁶ Some of the opposition, predictably, has come from within the IAS itself. However, there is reluctance even in the political class to implement such reforms. According to some IAS officers, politicians oppose the idea of functional domains because then they would not be able to pick and choose their

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Admiral Arun Prakash, New Delhi, June 27, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion on the problems and reforms needed in Indian bureaucracies see Devesh Kapur and Pratap Bhanu Mehta (eds.), *Public Institutions in India: Performance and Design* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005). Also see “Effective government,” *Seminar*, Issue No 594, February 2009.

¹⁴⁶ For more about this see SR Maheshwari, “Administrative Reforms in India: Past, Present and Future Prospects,” *CPR Occasional Paper Series No.4, 2003-2004* (New Delhi: Center for Policy Research), pp. 11-14 and Krishna K. Tummala, “Administrative Reforms in India,” in Ali Farazmand (ed.) *Administrative Reforms in Developing Countries* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), p. 35.

favoured bureaucrats for their ministries.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, this will disallow politicians from shifting around bureaucrats who do not ‘toe the line.’ Whatever the reason, this arrangement translates in to a lack of expertise in defence among officials posted to the MOD. As a result, three problems occur. First, information asymmetries, inherently problematic in civil-military relations, between service headquarters and civilian bureaucrats in the MOD increase considerably.¹⁴⁸ Second, civilian officials in the MOD, like most other ministries, often get posted from completely unrelated ministries and have little institutional memory or knowledge of the issues involved. Moreover, this rotation results in a constant ‘reinvention of the wheel.’ Finally, civilians in the MOD lack the capacity to arbitrate among competing parochial service interests or even evaluate functional issues like long term defence planning, military capabilities and strategies, etc. Paradoxically, the current structure of financial and bureaucratic control means that they retain considerable control over these crucial processes. Acknowledging this problem, the government has tried to post officials to the MOD for longer tenures than usual - however this is at best an ad-hoc measure.

The final characteristic of Indian civil-military relations is that the services enjoy considerable autonomy over their own internal affairs. Hence on matters pertaining to what it considers its own sphere of activities—operational planning, training and education, threat assessments, force structure, doctrine, innovations, appointments (up to a certain rank), etc. the services are able to do what they want. Of course, any measure having financial implications or changes in personnel structures have to be approved by the MOD but, by and large, most proposals pertaining to the ‘internal affairs’ of the services are cleared. This sort of autonomy gives a lot of leeway to the services. According to Vice Admiral PS Das, one of the members of the Arun Singh committee, “among all major democracies in the world the Indian military chiefs [army, air force and navy] are one of the most powerful, having both operational and staffing responsibilities.”¹⁴⁹ However, this is also a function of the lack of

¹⁴⁷ Interview with IAS officer, April 22, 2008, Washington DC.

¹⁴⁸ Information asymmetry is a result of the ‘agency problem’, see Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight and Civil-military relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁹ Interview with author, June 24, 2009, New Delhi.

specialisation within the bureaucracy, as the services are left to conduct their own affairs in a policy vacuum without any explicit or detailed directions on any of their internal issues. As a result, the services plan as they, and their chiefs, deem fit. This arrangement, in turn, results in two problems. First due to considerable autonomy, integration among the services becomes problematic. The most obvious problem is the different war fighting strategies, and contingencies, adopted by the three services.¹⁵⁰ The second problem arising from autonomy is the potential for personality driven, top-down policies. Creating powerful service chiefs gives them the ability to affect many changes within their organisations. This can, of course, be beneficial as it allows for considerable flexibility. However, it can also have negative consequences. For instance, the pro-rata system of promotions by which vacancies in senior appointments in the army were to be decided by proportional representation, resembling a quota system, was pushed through despite internal opposition.¹⁵¹ Moreover, sudden changes due to personalities and styles of command prevent both systemic stability and long-term planning.

Other democracies also face problems in civil-military relations. Information asymmetries, agency problems, expertise and attaining the correct ‘civil-military balance’ are all issues that are intensely debated. While examining four successful wartime commanders, Eliot Cohen argued for the idea of an ‘unequal dialogue’ between political and military leaders, “a dialogue, in that both sides expressed their views bluntly, indeed, sometimes offensively, and not once but repeatedly— and unequal, in that the final authority of the civilian leader was unambiguous and unquestioned.”¹⁵² However, the three characteristics that makes Indian civil-military relations unique—lack of political intervention, lack of bureaucratic expertise and autonomy to the military, combine together

¹⁵⁰ This point is made succinctly in AK Ghosh, “Budgeting for Desired Defence Capability,” pp. 49-50.

¹⁵¹ A number of representations against the pro-rata system were made from within the army at that time however it was still implemented (interview with retired officer, August 06, 2009). For more on the impact of the pro-rata system see Vijay Mohan, “Heartburn as Infantry, Artillery eat into AVSC pie,” *The Tribune*, July 21, 2009.

¹⁵² Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, statesmen and leadership in wartime* (New York: Free press, 2002) pp. 209.

to create an ‘absent dialogue.’¹⁵³ In other words, politicians rarely provide guidance to the military, or keep themselves adequately informed of military plans and capabilities unless forced by a crisis. The bureaucrats without much defence expertise concentrate on the process of decision-making instead of the outcome. Moreover in the absence of political interest they often emerge as crucial power brokers. Stephen Cohen had referred to this as an alliance forged between the civil service and the politicians “for the purposes of reducing the role of the military in the decision-making process.”¹⁵⁴ In turn, the different services, without explicit guidance, protect their turf and engage in bureaucratic maximization. Indeed according to K. Subrahmanyam, in the current structure of civil-military relations “politicians enjoy power without any responsibility, bureaucrats wield power without any accountability and the military assumes responsibility without any direction.”¹⁵⁵ Moreover India’s unique information dissemination policy, or the lack of it, prevents the development of independent expertise and hence well-informed debates on national security, military strategy and defence planning are not possible. Perhaps alone among the major democracies of the world, the Indian government does not allow scholars access to archives of ‘sensitive’ ministries like defence, home and external affairs.¹⁵⁶ As a result the debate on these issues is confined to former officials of these ministries who, usually, defend their parent organisation and rarely challenge prevailing narratives.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ See Anit Mukherjee, “Absent Dialogue,” *Seminar*, Issue No. 599, July 2009, pp. 24-28.

¹⁵⁴ See Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 171.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with K. Subrahmanyam, New Delhi, March 2008.

¹⁵⁶ In fact, none of the ministries have maintained proper archives and rarely transfer their files to the National Archives (interview with archivist at the National Archives, August 04, 2009).

¹⁵⁷ India’s strategic community, uniquely, is composed mostly of retired military or government officials. There are few academics and career streams are limited. However this is gradually changing with the establishment of numerous think- tanks.

Groundhog Day: The Fresh Demand for Reforms

In recent times, there has been an increasing clamour for change and for revisiting the post-Kargil defence reforms. This sentiment is increasingly prevalent in professional journals and among certain sections of the Indian strategic community.¹⁵⁸ Among the few academic studies of this subject, one concludes that “these [post Kargil defence] reforms are more in form rather than in substance.”¹⁵⁹ The Standing Committee on Defence also “strongly recommend[ed] that the government should constitute a high powered expert committee to reorganise, reform and restructure the armed forces with a view to implementing the recommendations made on the subject matter both by the GoM in its report submitted in 2001 and the Standing Committee on Defence in their earlier as well as this Report.”¹⁶⁰ In short, there is a growing realisation that the reform process has not worked as it was intended to.

Such sentiments are even articulated by the architects of these reforms. Typically, K. Subrahmanyam disagreed with the functioning of the NSC and instead referred to the 1998 Pant Committee report as a preferred “starting point to begin the reorganisation of the NSC secretariat.”¹⁶¹ Expressing his unhappiness with the defence reforms process he recommended a high powered commission to examine the entire structure

¹⁵⁸ On July 18, 2009 during a key note address at a conference in New Delhi, Air Commodore Jasjit Singh made a single point recommendation to constitute a committee to re-visit the reforms, see N. Manoharan, “CAPS-NMF-CLAWS-CENJOWS-IDSA Guest Lecture on National Security,” *Claws Article No. 1374*, August 06, 2009. Also see Manoj Joshi, “Military weakness shapes our policy,” *Mail Today*, January 07, 2009, C. Uday Bhaskar, “Needed: Revamp of National Security Apparatus,” *Boloji.Com*, December 04, 2008, and Ashwini Channan, “A Disquiet Within: Astigmatism in Civil-Military Relations,” *South Asia Defence and Strategic Review*, January 25, 2009.

¹⁵⁹ Vinod Anand, “Integrating the Indian Military: Retrospect and Prospect,” *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 2, No.2, Winter 2008, p. 20

¹⁶⁰ Standing Committee on Defence, *Thirty Sixth Report*, p. v.

¹⁶¹ K. Subrahmanyam, “Intelligence needs reforms,” *Indian Express*, June 25, 2004.

of the armed forces and national security bureaucracies.¹⁶² Satish Chandra, the member-secretary of both the KRC and the GOM, while analysing the national security structures argued that, “turf battles have also taken their toll in slowing down or even completely blocking reform.”¹⁶³ According to Vice Admiral PS Das a prominent member of the Arun Singh committee, “only 50 per cent of the [original] recommendations have been implemented.”¹⁶⁴ This demand for reforms is not just restricted to the field of defence. BG Verghese, former member of the KRC, while examining border management concludes that an “integrated policy is long overdue.”¹⁶⁵ Madhav Godbole, the chairman of the task force on border management, commented that “even after passing of six years of the submission of report, the same has not been implemented properly.”¹⁶⁶ The architect of the intelligence reforms, GC Saxena, has refrained from discussing the issue. However, while analysing intelligence failures Ajai Sahni complained that the implementation of the Saxena committee report “has remained tardy, partial and ineffectual.”¹⁶⁷

Despite such unanimity in opinions, however, there is little indication that such a course will be adopted by the government. In the absence of a crisis, there is little momentum or consensus for change. Even if the government does constitute a committee to re-visit the reforms, there is little assurance that the implementation of their recommendations would be any different from that of the Arun Singh committee. Ultimately then, the failures in the post-Kargil defence reforms must be attributed less to bureaucratic politics, which is inevitable, and more to a lack of political will. In a recent interview K. Subrahmanyam put the responsibility squarely on the political class when he argued that “we have to acknowledge that

¹⁶² K. Subrahmanyam, “Indian Armed Forces,” *Dainik Jagran*, February 03, 2008 and “An Armed Forces Commission,” *Defence and Security Alert*, September 2009.

¹⁶³ Satish Chandra, “National Security System and Reform,” pp. 224. This article, especially, is quite scathing in its review of the functioning of the NSC and other organisations.

¹⁶⁴ Interview, New Delhi, June 25, 2009.

¹⁶⁵ B.G. Verghese “Stable Borders Make Secure Boundaries,” in Satish Kumar (ed.), *India's National Security Annual Review 2007* (New Delhi: Knowledge World Publishers, 2007), p. 473.

¹⁶⁶ See his testimony to the Standing Committee on Defence, *Twenty Second Report*, p.70.

¹⁶⁷ Ajai Sahni, “A triumph of form over content,” *Seminar*, No. 593, January 2009, also see Sandeep Unnithan, “Spy versus Spy,” *India Today*, September 07, 2007.

India's political class is still not in a position to tackle the national security issues with the seriousness they deserve—a fact that has to be acknowledged with a lot of regret 10 years after the Kargil Committee Report came out.”¹⁶⁸

Ironically, the current structure of civil-military relations is expedient for political leaders for three reasons. First, usually defence ministers are important political figures in their own party or coalition and hence have little time to devote exclusively to the defence ministry. According to a former military chief the last defence minister, Pranab Mukherjee, an important troubleshooter and member of numerous GoMs in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime, “just did not have the time to attend to defence matters.”¹⁶⁹ As a result, most defence ministers find it convenient for bureaucrats in the MOD to handle day to day activities. Second, lack of expertise on defence affairs makes most political figures insecure about their own knowledge. As a result they are unwilling to challenge pre-existing bureaucracies. Moreover in the absence of consensus about reforms, they are unwilling to push through potentially controversial reforms, like creation of CDS. Doing so increases the chances of electoral accountability, in case of any set backs. Not taking a decision, on the other hand, reduces that possibility as mistakes can be shifted onto others. Finally, there is an unstated fear, within the bureaucratic and political class, about ‘empowering’ the military. The historical fears about a praetorian military have only been reinforced by the experiences of India's neighbours—Pakistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. According to Ashley Tellis “the weaknesses of this [civilian] control system are widely recognised in India, but being content with the protection afforded by the country's great size and inherent strength relative to its adversaries, Indian security managers—historically—have consciously refrained from altering the structure of strict civilian control no matter what benefits in increased military efficiency might accrue as a result.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ “Report of the Kargil Review Committee: An Appraisal,” *CLAWS Journal*, Summer 2009, p.19

¹⁶⁹ Interview with former Service Chief, who wished to remain anonymous, June 2009.

¹⁷⁰ Ashley Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), p. 285.

Conclusion

Post-Kargil defence reforms in India have had a mixed legacy. They have been successful in initiating an unparalleled, intellectual debate on national security issues both within the armed forces and in the Indian public. However, they have also been strongly resisted by existing bureaucracies and a lack of political attention. In some quarters this has revived George Tanham's argument on "the lack of Indian strategic culture."¹⁷¹ While disagreeing with his cultural explanation Amitabh Mattoo instead has argued, that "bureaucratic inertia, political ineptitude and the state of civil-military relations... may have more to do with the absence of strategic thinking."¹⁷² Indeed, as this paper argues it is broadly these three factors that have obstructed defence reforms. In fact most security issues in India—from the Cold Start doctrine to development of nuclear weapons can be best understood by studying institutional processes, civil-military relations and political preferences. Of course none of these variables are static and are constantly evolving in response to a number of factors including threat levels, technology, resources, etc. Another potential source of change is the frequent interaction with other militaries and national security agencies, especially those of the United States. The Indian armed forces are currently engaging with other militaries at unprecedented levels—with frequent exercises, visits, training delegations and education exchanges.¹⁷³ In fact a number of newly created institutions in India have been modelled on their United States counterparts like the Army Training Command (ARTRAC), Office of Net Assessment (ONA), Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the Centre for Army Lessons Learnt (CALL). This trend is even replicated in the intelligence agencies with the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) being modelled on the National Security Agency (NSA). Thus enhanced access to

¹⁷¹ Harsh Pant, "A Rising India's Search for a Foreign Policy," *Orbis*, Volume 53, Issue 2, 2009, p. 260.

¹⁷² See Amitabh Mattoo, "Raison d'état or Adhocism?" in *Securing India*, p.205.

¹⁷³ For a perspective on this see Colonel KA Muthanna, *Enabling Military to Military Cooperation as a Foreign policy Tool: Options for India* (New Delhi: Knowledge World Publishers, 200

information and emulation is leading to an intellectual cross fertilisation that can potentially transform India's approach to national security. However, these reforms can only succeed if the political class overrides bureaucratic opposition to re-engineer national security agencies. One of the best ways to do this is to allow an active and informed debate by, among other measures and declassifying numerous committee reports including the Committee on Defence Expenditure, Annexure of the Kargil Review Committee and the Arun Singh Committee report. Unfortunately, the likelihood of a forceful political intervention to allow all this to happen at this time appears to be dim.

List of Officials Interviewed (Arranged Alphabetically)

Name of Official	Appointment/Affiliation
Maj. Gen. Dipankar Bannerjee	Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS)
Amb. Naresh Chandra	Defence Secretary, MOD
Satish Chandra	Secretary, Kargil Review Committee
PR Chari	MOD and Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis(IDSA)
Lt. Gen. Shantonu Choudhary	Vice Chief of Army Staff
Vice Adm. PS Das	Member Group of Ministers (GOM) Committee 2002
AK Ghosh	Secretary, Finance, MOD
IK Gujral	Prime Minister
Lt. Gen. KK Hazari	Member, Kargil Review Committee
Lt Gen. AS Kalkat	Indian Peace Keeping Force Commander, Sri Lanka, 1987-90
Bharat Karnad	National Security Advisory Board member
Gen. VP Malik	Chief of Army and Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC)
Lt. Gen. S.S. Mehta	Deputy Chief of Army Staff and member of Task force on Management of Defence

Name of Official	Appointment/Affiliation
Rear Adm. Raja Menon	Former Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Operations)
Brijesh Mishra	Principal Secretary and National Security Adviser
Lt. Gen. Satish Nambiar	Deputy Chief of Army Staff
Lt. Gen. Nannavatty	Northern Army Commander
Gen VR Raghavan	Director General Military Operations
KC Pant	Defense Minister
Lt. Gen HS Panag	Former Army Commander
Adm. Arun Prakash	Navy Chief, Chairman, COSC and member of Task force on Management of Defence
Vice Adm. Raman Puri	Chief of Integrated Defense Staff, 2003-06
Gen Shantanu Roychoudhary	Chief of Army Staff
Gen VN Sharma	Chief of Army Staff
Arun Singh	Minister of State for Defence and Chairman of Task force on Management of Defence
Dhirendra Singh	MOD and member of Task force on Management of Defence
Air Commodore Jasjit Singh	IDSA and Center for Air Power Studies (CAPS)
Jaswant Singh	Defence Minister

Name of Official	Appointment/Affiliation
Ajai Vikram Singh	Defence Secretary, MOD
NS Sisodia	MOD, Member Group of Ministers (GOM) Committee 2002 and IDSA
K. Subramanyam	MOD and Chairman of Kargil Review Committee
BG Verghese	Member, Kargil Review Committee
NN Vohra	Defence Secretary, MOD
Serving Officers	Ministry of Defence, Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), Military Operations Directorate, Army HQ and Naval HQ.

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