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Civil-Military Fusion in the Indian Context

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Military and civilian relations have been prevalent from the times humans settled down in civilisations and waged wars for civilisational survival. These two bodies are integral parts of any nation, civilisation or tribe and have interdependence irrespective of their divergent roles. It is important to define the civilian body in a Civil-Military conundrum. The civilian is anything non-military that is involved in the administrative and political functions of the state. In definite terms, these include the political entities and the bureaucrats. Johana Mendelson Forman and Claude Welch define Civil-Military Relations (CMR) as:

“Civil Military relations refer broadly to interactions between armed forces as institutions and the sectors of the society in which they are embedded. Most commonly, civil-military relations focus on the relative distribution of power between the government and the armed forces of the country.”¹

Samuel Huntington defines CMR at two levels. At the power level, it is the power of the officer corps relative to the civilian groups within the society. On the ideological level, it is the compatibility of professional military ethics with the political ideologies prevailing in the society.²

Through all the definitions, a few points that characterise civil-military relations emerge: First, it is the relations between military and civilian bodies at a higher level of society (officer's corps and governing organs of the civilians, as per Huntington). Second, there is power and ideology involved. This is where the CMR definition leads to 'civilian control' of the military, which Huntington writes, “the role of the military in society has been frequently discussed in terms of *civilian control*.”³ Gp Capt Rajesh Chaudhary argues that the definition of CMR has been laid down by Western construct, although he agrees the key ingredient of CMR continues to be civilian control over military forces.

Relation and Fusion

If CMR has a pessimistic shade, with the wresting of control as the objective, one might question why this concept warrants attention or study, especially from the military side. The study of CMR is essential to protect our sovereignty and ensure robust national security. Any challenge to a nation's sovereignty and security is addressed by the national powers in which the military and politics have key roles. To ensure that the nation is not weakened, it is essential that CMR be studied, structured, refined, and implemented. No nation in the world can exist without a relationship between the military and government, as they work together towards a nation's existence, growth and security. Gp Capt Chaudhary mentions the harmony that existed between the military and society from the Vedic era

onwards.⁴ The great Gupta Empire, which hallmarks the golden age of Indian history, had effective civil-military liaison. The ruler had his military department, but along with it, he had diplomats- the minister of war and peace, known as the “Mahasandhivigrahika”, and the finance minister, known as the “Ranabhandagaradhikarna”, who ably supported the military in pursuit of the empire’s expansion and glory. In the colonial era, the British had a setup of Governors and Commanders-in-Chief, which effectively ruled India for 300 years (with relatively minimal conflict between them). In China, the relationship between the government, bureaucrats and the military has been prevalent since the Shang/Zhou era. The bureaucrats and military relations in ancient China had strains because of literacy and class differences, but the relations were instrumental in stretching the empire till the 20th century. In the modern world, where democracy is the primary ideology of governance, the military cannot wish away civilian control.

It is paradoxical that the military, which is supposed to preserve a government, is feared by the same government. Peter D Feaver puts it as: “The very institution created to protect the polity becomes a threat to the polity.” The study of CMR is even more important for the military because ‘sensible civilian control’ and ‘strong military power’ can together team up to ensure good governance, accelerated national growth, improved stability and robust national security. Through the study of CMR, military leaders can bring trust and efficiency in their dealings while continuing to improve the strength of the military towards the nation’s security. The relations, when intertwined, become interdependent and more productive. This is called ‘Fusion’. The idea of CMR needs to be graduated to Civil-Military Fusion. The concept of Civil-Military Fusion (CMF) denotes the convergence of military and civilian resources and systems for maximising a nation’s ability to express its comprehensive national power both during war and peacetime.⁵

This brings the problem statement:

What are the key critical determinants of civil-military fusion, and how can they be applied in the Indian context?

Fusion has a wide array of subjects under it. This paper will restrict itself to fusion leading to the transformation of CMR.

Types of Civilian Controls

Civilian control over the army, justified as a necessary requirement for stability and good governance, is broadly classified into ‘Subjective civilian control’ and ‘Objective civilian control.’⁶ In subjective control, the civilian group(s) enjoy complete power and the military power is minimised.

Military professionalism reaches its nadir in such control. Subjective control has been identified with the maximisation of the power of particular government institutions, social classes, and constitutional forms. In objective control, the objective is to maximise military professionalism. The political power is distributed between the military and polity to enhance military professionalism. For instance, India, after independence, saw subjective civilian control until reforms started after lessons from 1962 and the Kargil War. Israel has had good objective control since its independence.

Any type of control can only be effective when it dictates (controls) 'power'. Power exists in two forms: formal authority and informal influence.⁷ Civilian control is about increasing the power of civilian bodies and reducing the authority and influence of their military counterparts. Having defined CMR/CMF, analysing types of CMR and civilian control is imperative to identify its determinants.

Determinants of CMR/CMF in the Indian Context

The determinants of Civil-Military relations are multifaceted and influenced by many factors. Some of these factors, with their implications on the Indian context, are as follows:

Political Ideology

The political ideology of the nation characterises its pro/anti-military stance. Political ideology is a set of values and attitudes oriented around the problems of the state.⁸ Huntington describes four ideologies, namely, Liberalism, Marxism, Fascism and Conservatism and examines how the civil-military relations intertwine in each. The military function is most professional under the conservatism ideology. India is a democracy, and its political ideologies affect the military shift between right, left and centre depending upon the government in power. India, unlike the US, doesn't have very clearly defined and sharply alienated ideologies. Rather, all political ideologies undergo a shift/melee and adapt to a new format—for example, Neoliberalism and neo-conservatism.

Political Stability

Political stability establishes an environment where national powers are not under stress and work in great cohesion towards the nation's cause. After Independence, India had a relatively better-oriented and stable government than Pakistan. The CMR in Pakistan deteriorated and reached a point when the military had to take over.⁹ Conversely, India saw increasing civilian control, which put some compromises on military professionalism. Thus, Political stability is the bedrock on which CMR can function.

Higher Defence Organisation (HDO)

The institutions of HDO play an important role in defining the CMR. In India, after independence, the HDO was adapted from the colonial setup. It was amended to increase civilian control and minimise military influence. The post of Commander in Chief was abolished, and military chiefs were made chiefs of staff and brought down in protocol subservient to politburo. This weakened the military professionalism and its ability to advise the government on security matters. The debacle of 1962 is the result of this degraded CMR and ill-executed HDO setup. In the US, the Goldwater Nichols Act was needed to reform the HDO to strengthen military decision-making and professionalism. After the implementation of the results of the Kargil Review Committee, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) and the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) were created. This has helped defence services to have more presence in government dealings and improved military decision-making. Effective CMF requires strong institutional capacity with mechanisms for interagency coordination and collaboration.

Cultural Differences between the two Verticals

Civil and military have their own unique cultures even while working towards a common goal. In medieval China, the bureaucrats considered the military to be semiliterate or illiterate and kept them away from positions of power. The military farmer conscript of the Weisuo and the Fubing system shaped their beliefs. In India, the government, after Independence, continued to be fearful of military power and drew analogies to the coup and military takeovers in Pakistan, Syria and Africa to prepare a coup-proofing mechanism. With the increasing gap between military society and the civil dimension, this mistrust is going to increase, and this needs to be bridged with active engagement, creating institutions, increasing jointmanship, interoperability and intermixing the cultural nuances.

Geo-Political Environment and National Security

The need for national security is a key determinant towards CMR. National security is the overarching thing that should be paramount and the top most priority for every organisation. Studying the national security environment would be helpful in understanding the challenges therein, and expectations from CMR can be defined in clearer terms. In recent times, China's belligerence has revived positive interaction between Indian civil and military structures. All elements of national power, which includes politics, bureaucracy and the military, are working harmoniously together to counter the dragon. Similarly, geo-political issues like terrorism, the increase of religious fundamentalism and the multi-polarity of the world can reshape the civil-military understandings and improve future coordination and collaboration.

Political Will and Leadership

Political leadership can steer a healthy civil-military relationship. PM Modi, in his second term, implemented the posts of CDS and DMA, thus bringing the military and government closer. Likewise, he has put focus on geo-political affairs and strengthened the role of Ministry of External Affairs. All the powers of the military, finance, foreign affairs have worked together towards fast-track defence procurements of Rafale fighter aircraft, solve the Galwan crisis, conduct anti-terrorism surgical and air strikes, evacuate civilians from war-torn regions, etc.

Strategic Culture

India has a rich history of 7000 years in which empires have flourished, exemplifying good and effective civil-military relations. The civilisational continuity, the culture of dharma, ethics, and righteousness puts the Indian military on a high moral pedestal in the worldview. However, in warfare, our culture also talks about *kutayudhha* (diplomacy), strength, dominance, and aggression. We have the literature of Arthashastra, Vedas, Upanishads, Nitishastra, and epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana, which gives an invaluable peek into statecraft and policy making. Using our strategic culture to formulate an efficient and effective civil-military relationship can be explored.

Way Ahead

Based on India's own history, ethos and strategic culture, India must create its own unique edifices to achieve integration and civil-military fusion. Common vision and convergence of tasks/action between civil and military will help in achieving national goals. A strong political leadership prioritising CMF as a national security imperative and clear legal and policy frameworks defining roles, responsibilities and authorities of civilian and military actors would help in achieving good CMF. It is recommended to create strong institutions to facilitate interagency coordination/collaboration, improve HDO, and ensure CMF efforts in advanced technology like AI, cyber, and space. Cultural differences should be alleviated, and mutual understanding and respect should be institutionalised through policies. A bottom-up approach for better CMR is recommended. The strategic culture of our nation's rich 7000 years of history should be kept in the picture while formulating policies for CMR and not ape Western module. The civil and military are two powerhouses where effective CMF can enhance India's security postures and help address emerging, dynamic threats in furtherance of national objectives.

Notes:

¹ Welch, Johana Mendelson Forman and Claude, "Civil Military relations: USAID's role," Centre of Democracy and Governance, Washington DC, 1998, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnacc887.pdf. <https://www.idsa.in/event/Panel-Discussion-on-Civil-Military-Fusion-in-India>. Accessed on April 02, 2024.

² S. Huntington, *The soldier and the state* (London: Harvard University Press, 1957).

³ S. Huntington, *The soldier and the state* (London: Harvard University Press, 1957), p 80.

⁴ Gp Capt R. Chaudhary, *Transforming India's external security using ancient strategic culture* (New Delhi: KW Publisher, 2021), p 28.

⁵ C. D. Kumar, "Panel discussion on civil mitary fusion in inida," in Manohar parrikar Institute of defence studies and analyses, 2022. <https://www.idsa.in/event/Panel-Discussion-on-Civil-Military-Fusion-in-India>. Accessed on April 02, 2024

⁶ S. Huntington, *The soldier and the state* (London: Harvard University Press, 1957), Pp. 80-97.

⁷ S. Huntington, *The soldier and the state* (London: Harvard University Press, 1957), Pp 86-90.

⁸ S. Huntington, *The soldier and the state* (London: Harvard University Press, 1957), p 90.

⁹ Samuel I. Wilkinson, *Army and Nation* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black publisher, 2015).