

Civil-Military Relations

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Speaking Notes

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I will speak frankly in the knowledge that what we say will stay in this room and among those present.

Definition:

I use the term civil-military relations loosely. As NN Vohra reminded us in his masterly speech on this subject on December 6, 2013, in its true meaning there is the highest regard for our armed forces in civilian society and there is no crisis in civil-military relations in India. But the term is really used as shorthand for higher defence management, the relation between our political leaders in government, the civil services and the armed forces.

The Modes:

- 1.** Eliot Cohen speaks of two contrasting ways/models of managing civil-military relations, by **integration** or by **separation**. Integration is the original Chinese model of a Red Army, where the Party and the Army are one, where political commissars countersign all orders, with the Army integrated in society, playing roles such as “the university of the people” (Mao), performing social and infrastructure tasks in the civilian economy and polity, and serving as role models (Lei Feng) for society. Even China has moved away from this to separation, so that she can have a professional army.
- 2.** We in India have always followed the separation model. The Army, at independence, was still regarded by most politicians as an instrument of the Raj by politicians who had fought for India’s freedom. While it’s professional competence was left to itself, there were peculiarities in the way the civil military interface was organised in India. Regiments continued to be organised on caste and provincial lines. At independence, the Chiefs, when asked, chose control over administration, promotions, land etc. over the creation of a single point of military advice to the RM.
- 3.** We have come a long way since then. When PM spoke to the last Combined Commanders Conference on 22 November 2013 he said: “Let me assert, clearly and unequivocally, that the political leadership of India has the highest faith in its military and its institutional rectitude within the democratic framework. The apo-

litical nature of our military and its proven professionalism are the envy of the world and have also nurtured the Indian democratic experience. Our democracy and institutions have proven their ability to deal with any issues or doubts that may arise.”

Issues/Misperceptions:

1. **Roles:** It is worth reminding ourselves of the Constitutional provisions. Under List 1 of the 7th Schedule of the Constitution, it is the Government of India’s responsibility to ensure the “Defence of India and every part thereof”. The Supreme Command of the Armed Forces is with the President. The responsibility for National Defence rests in the Cabinet and this responsibility is discharged through the Ministry of Defence. It is the Ministry of Defence which provides the policy framework and the wherewithal to the Armed Forces to discharge their responsibility for the defence of the country.
2. The Government of India Allocation of Business Rules (1961) distribute the subjects in List 1 of the Constitution among different departments of the Government of India. The Transaction of Business Rules (1961) provide how this work will be carried out and say that, “In each department the Secretary shall be the administrative head thereof and shall be responsible for the proper transaction of business and the careful observance of these rules in that department.”
3. In other words **the Defence Ministry is responsible to the Government of India for dealing with all matters relating to the Defence of India and the Armed Forces of the Union.** As provided under the Defence Service Regulations, **the Chiefs of the Services are responsible** to the President, through the Defence Ministry, **for the command, discipline, recruitment, training, organisation, administration and preparation of war of their respective Services.**
4. Since the ToBR were amended with the establishment of the Integrated Army, Navy, Air and Defence Staff Headquarters in the MOD, the IHQ are involved with policy formulation in regard to the Defence of India and the Armed Forces of the Union. They are also responsible for providing executive directions required in the implementation of policies laid down by the MOD.
5. That is the constitutional scheme under which we work. Sadly this does not seem well enough known and there is unnecessary public controversy over the perceived role of the armed forces in the defence of India.
6. For instance, there is a demand for an amendment of the Transaction of Business Rules to include the Service Chiefs. Please note that as the Transaction of Business Rules themselves say, these are rules “for the more convenient transaction of the business of the Government of India”, no more and no less. I there-

fore fail to see how the present rules in any way diminish the role of the Services in the defence of India. Do the Service Chiefs want to be dealing with every other government department and bureaucracy as the MOD does today? Please **show me one operational issue on which civilians or politicians have overruled the services**. I cannot think of one in the last eight years.

7. **Decision Making**: There are two aspects to this problem. It is often asserted that the Services or Chiefs are not consulted in decision making on matters of defence. This is certainly not true. Most decisions on defence matters are initiated in the Service HQ, and where there is a regular interchange between RM and the Chiefs. They are also invited to the CCS when significant issues are discussed. And the NSC is an institution where the Chiefs are present.
8. It is also alleged that the Chiefs are not part of the Nuclear Command Authority. This too is not true as they are members of the Executive Committee and participate in the Political Committee, the two highest bodies of the NCA. C-in-C SFC reports to the Chairman, CoSC.
9. The other aspect is the integration of military officers in MOD and of civilians in the Service HQ. This is necessary, has been suggested by the Naresh Chandra Task Force, and is pending before the CCS for a decision in the absence of consensus on its implementation.
10. **Acquisitions and Procurements**: It is alleged that delays in acquisitions are affecting our defence preparedness and that this is due to the role of the politicians and bureaucrats in the process. I would be the first to say that we need to improve our acquisition processes considerably in order to use Indian industry and expertise to the fullest. But to blame the present system, with its delays, its tendency to be gamed, and its corruption, only on civilians and politicians is far from the truth. The services are actually major drivers of the system as it is.
11. The current processes for revenue and capital procurements are based on initiation of proposals in Services and the participation of Services at every stage. In the case of capital procurements, the Joint Secretary only begins to participate at the Contract Negotiation Stage, (stage 15 of a 17 stage process that takes 137 months!). All stages, including the the all important QR formulation and technical trials are completely Service run. The prioritisation of defence acquisitions is steered by HQ IDS. I cannot think of a single case where MOD over-turned the priority attached by the Services.
12. In revenue procurements, the overwhelming majority of maintenance and operating requirements can be met within the delegated powers of the Services. For instance, ammunition, is a revenue item, requiring no approvals outside the Services.

13. The real problem with regard to defence procurements and the alleged capability gaps is not so much a result of civil-military relations as of the challenge of prioritising competing needs within finite resources. Both elements of the defence management system, civil and military, need to work together to improve the system and its working.
14. **JCS/CDS/PC COSC**: The real issue is whether this institution, however named, will have purely staff functions or command functions as well. K. Subrahmaniam's suggestion was that it have staff functions and that command functions be with Theatre Commands which would be joint. In my view it is essential that we set up such an institution for a single point of military advice to government. In my experience, the opposition has always come from among the Services or Chiefs themselves, either openly or privately
15. To my mind a CDS is essential because it will stop the mindless competition between the Services for resources, roles and attention. It will also enable us to rationally set priorities between resources and roles, setting a coherent defence strategy, and bring in the beginnings of true jointness.
16. The price of separation/autonomy is **professionalism**. That is what I have found missing in several areas of jointness that I have dealt with.
17. **Aid to Civil Authority**: Where there are some civil-military issues is when the Armed Forces, primarily the Army, are deployed in aid to civil power and on internal security duties. While we have rightly tried to minimise this, it has been unavoidable and long term deployments on IS duties in J&K and the North East have affected the Army's reputation, led to demands for changes in the AFSPA and so on. To my mind there is a simple step, of introducing an independent review mechanism before invoking AFSPA legally, which would meet the concerns of most of the public. In the longer run, we need to be prepared for continuing demands on the Army for law and order and internal security duties. Some interoperability with CPMFs and training of our police by the Army would be useful to lessen that demand.
18. **Service Conditions**: The real source of resentment among some serving and retired officers seems to be "disparity" in pay and allowances between service personnel and civilians. This is a matter of opinion, and can be examined and discussed. It cannot be that Services cherry pick those parts of service conditions they like from what others or civilians get, and keep certain privileges unique to themselves where it suits them. The idea of separateness is to prevent this kind of comparison and cherry picking, and that instead the particular needs

of our personnel of all services, military or civilian, are met to the greatest extent possible.

19. Respect for the Armed Forces: When we see a serving CoAS going to the Supreme Court for his date of birth and to extend his service tenure, there is no distinction or separation of the military from the civil. We have all seen the TV spectacle, coup speculation, stories about TSD, and allegations of corruption in the Army from the same former Chief!! The more military officers are seen on TV channels the **less respect** there will be for the armed forces among the general public. Familiarity breeds contempt. This is a real danger. We must not let what happened to the police happen to our armed forces.

Conclusion:

20. Why have these misconceptions gained currency even among those who should know better about the interface between civil and military officials? Part of the reason is shorter and shorter tenures which result in many more (retired and serving) people holding grand posts with less and less knowledge or real experience of the domain. This is especially true in specialised domains like intelligence, strategic forces and so on.

21. The **blame must be shared** between politicians, soldiers and civilians for the fact that we have come to a situation where we need to have a discussion like this. We will never agree on apportioning blame for this state of affairs between the three sides of this equation, but the fact is that all three are responsible to some extent. What is new is the temptation to go to the media and politicians with complaints, rather than to the head of one's own service or organisation.

22. We need a **reset of civil-military relations**. But these are only one part of a much more complex whole, a set of reforms that is necessary if we are to adjust to the times and changes in military affairs and the situation around us in India and abroad. My own suggestion to the new government would be a **Military Reforms Commission** to go into these issues.

23. I am afraid that **the environment** in which we have to manage these issues is only **going to get harder**. Externally we face a real challenge from the rise of China, many orders more complex than that posed to us by Pakistan and China in the past. Internally, resources will remain tight. Today, our committed liabilities on the defence budget have grown to the point where the ratio between CL to

fund outgo for new schemes stands at 96:4! And this is when major schemes like MMRCA, new submarine and frigate programmes, and new Northern Army raisings are on the anvil. It would be easy for civilians and services to blame each other and move on. But the real, harder, answer is to build systems to **prioritise**, overcome old thinking and narrow service loyalties, in order to build the armed forces that we need.