

Cult of Acquiescence

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FOCUS ON THE ISSUE

A recurring theme in the evolution and practice of military ethos is: whether to stand up to the political boss or not; to take a stand on military and security matters or acquiesce. Standing up to or taking a stand against superior civil authority in a democratic system in professional or over national security matters is not disobedience, not quite as sacrilegious as that, certainly not in healthy politics and enlightened societies. When King Frederick in his notorious anger demanded the head of his devoted general, Von Seidlitz, for transgressing his battle instructions Seidlitz is said to have replied 'My Lord, my head is at your disposal, you may take it whenever you desire, but while it rests on my shoulders let me use it'. Much the same is attributed to Admiral Nelson's transgression of the sacrosanct battle tactics of his fleet in those days, whereby he is accorded the genius of "Knowing when to disobey". Von Seeckt, the Chief of the German General staff in the 1920's manipulated his government between the two World Wars through "designed militarism" to safeguard and promote the interests of the considerably circumscribed German Army and German military potential. But his successors, Ludwig Beck and Von Fritsch, were not as lucky in their opposition to their political boss, Hitler. Both were dismissed. Beck committed suicide later and Fritsch marched with his artillery regiment against Poland as a regimental officer to meet honourable death.

There is considerable debate in our own country among officers and civilians on this subject in the wake of Operations Blue Star and Pawan. For instance Brig. N.B. Grant (Retd) says that "it is the failure of the political-military equation that is causing concern--if the politicians were in such a great rush the Army brass also acquiesced to this, instead of standing up to the political leadership".¹ A. Balasubramaniam asserts that "the Army has no authority to question the wisdom of the government under any circumstances.... In case the government commits mistakes the people will bring it down through democratic process, but standing up and opposing when orders are given by competent authorities will amount to a military offence;² Maj Gen V.K. Madhok holds that "soldiers are not robots; (their) loyalty is to the nation and the constitution and not to a politician or a Minister of one of the political parties holding temporary office. When the politician is in the wrong it is the soldier -- the professional - who must put him on the right track while committing troops to battle"³.

N J Nanporia goes so far as to say that "in the Third World a neat and convenient line between (political and military situations) cannot be easily drawn; and if by any chance there is a collapse of civilian rule an Army familiar with national affairs and conditioned to cope with them would surely be preferable to one that is politically innocent", even while he accepts the argument that "so basic a rethinking on the Army's role will give the military ideas well above its proper station in the nation's life".⁴ Internally, within the organisation too there is pressure from the juniors on their seniors to take a stand on important issues. All this goes to focus on the sensitiveness of the issue of "standing up", and the increasing need for doing so, in the present turmoil which is creating unprecedented danger to the nation-state.

The one unexceptionable factor is that the soldier is not a robot; he is a living human being, breathing his people's air and aspirations. As requisites for the successful discharge of his duties he imbibes national and social virtues and values much more deeply than most other agencies, limbs and institutions of the nation-state, particularly, it may be noted, in the diverse multiplicity that the country is experimenting with, an experiment no other nation-state has undertaken democratically. Our national politics, power-sharing, political-military equations, accommodation of socio-economic aspirations within national security obligations and the military's contributory paradigm are singularly distinct and have no precedent or parallel. We have to shape them ourselves. Rigid, pre-conceived and imitative posture and wooden sentiments will not wash. The worst culprits will be those who choose to behold the military as over-eager for grabbing power through military intervention. That will be eminently unkind to one of the most dedicated and truly professional military forces in the world, as well as to one of the exceptionally plucky peoples engaged in a unique experiment of secular, liberal, economically dynamic democracy.

THE INSTITUTIONAL BASE

Samuel Huntington identified three-fold responsibilities of the military man to the State : representative, advisory and executive function⁵.

(a) *Representative Function*. To represent the claims of military security within the state machinery. Military man, he says, views national military policy in terms of the responsibility of, among others, emphasizing the magnitude and immediacy of the security threats, and opposing the state commitments and involvement of the state in war except when victory is certain; adding further that it is his function to warn the statesman when his purposes are beyond his means. "His contribution to the formulation of state policy is a cautious, conservative, restraining

voice. He has the right and duty to present his views in the public bodies, executive and legislature". (The last sentence needs to be specially noted).

(a) *Advisory Function.* To analyse and to report on the implications of alternative courses of state action from the military point of view.

(a) *Executive Function.* To implement state decisions with respect to military security even if it is a decision which runs violently counter to his military judgement.

Military forces are a non-productive, gargantuan money-guzzling agency, symbolising use of force and creating a feeling of distaste among society. Society often appears to be indifferent to and out of tune with the aims, aspirations and values of the armed forces, giving thereby a feeling to them that "their role and rationale are imperfectly understood"⁶ That generates alienation. The relationship between society's attitudes, indifference and/or antipathy towards the military, and the military's feeling of alienation from the society, the author says, produce estrangement. Ignorance, bureaucratic distancing, and "apathy of the society generated mainly by public ambivalence between the military's requirement of popular sanction of the organised application of military force on one hand and people's deep-seated reservations about the morality of such force" lead to indifference, the argument goes, exemplified by "the public expecting the government to look after the security aspect".⁶

Such social pressures work in a complex manner over the attitude and mental frame of the military hierarchy. Add to this "the levels of disillusionment and dissatisfaction within the services" obtaining in a turbulent, unstable politico-social environment, and one can have a fair idea of the seriousness and sensitiveness of the problem faced by the military.

The military represents a social segment that is well organised, well disciplined, well knit, well regulated and well controlled by an efficient, professional leadership; and is aware of its power potential. Through its self-evolved agency called military ethics it controls its military actions and destructive capacity".⁷ The function of military ethics is to identify the moral issues that arise because of the existence and use of military forces, explain the relation of those issues to one another, and attempt to come to terms with them". Military ethics is an internal, cultural control, and needs to constrain military actions and control destruction in terms of time, extent, type of weapons, types of objectives and military aims, even as it needs to be controlled, say the authors, by other agencies like civil control (organisational), political

control (directional), social control (Amnesty International) and media control.

It is thus evident from the foregoing that "the military man must have the ability to judge political consequences of military actions, and to integrate political sensitivities in directing and executing military tasks, though he may appear to overplay the role of custodian of national security in advising the government by over-emphasizing danger".⁸ He tends to direct his efforts to "penetrating and dominating civilian institutions (designed militarism) or by extending his power in an environment where civilian organisations have not had effective control over the military or where civilian leaders have not acted suitably and in time in critical situations (unanticipated militarism)".⁹

It is here that the military needs necessary and legitimate power vis-a-vis the government and its other agencies and institutions to fulfil its responsibilities to the State, to cope with social pressures, to integrate controls and to maintain its effectiveness in the nation's political-social-military relations.

Weber defines power as "the ability... to realise their own will...". Two out of the three "instruments of power" as classified by J.K. Galbraith¹⁰ are relevant to the military. These are :

- (a) Conditioned power : Winning submission by changing belief; persuasion, education or social commitment to what seems proper and right cause.
- (b) Condign Power : Winning submission by imposing alternative to the preferences of a group, sufficiently unpleasant to force abandonment of preferences; or by threatening adverse consequences.

Also relevant are organisation and personality as sources of power "to evolve relations; to bring about physical, moral and mental force to impress, influence, persuade, compel, and create belief", while the purpose of such power is "to extend to others its social and secular values, and to win support for its perception of the public good" in national security issues.

Stephen Cohen gives a historical perspective when he says "The legacy of the British was to keep the Army politically neutral; the Indians learned, however, that it was necessary to equip the military with political understanding".¹¹ He emphasizes that "civilians must demonstrate their own effectiveness, (while) the military is taught that civilian control is the norm". Where civilian control and politician's understanding of the military in the conduct of national security affairs are uncertain, unhealthy, directionless, selfish and ignorant, the military professional starts feeling uncomfortable, overtaxed

and misused. He doubts the credibility of civil authority and the moral justification of his use in applying military force and causing death and destruction. This results in his tendency to withhold or overact.

SE Finer says that military intervention may be against the government, or it may manifest in the military's refusal to act in accordance with the government.¹² He identifies military's perception of national interest, its destiny as saviour of the nation in peril, and its interest of self-image as motives favouring its intervention, even as its professionalism, distancing from politics, acceptance of civilian supremacy and other factors discourage intervention.

It should now be reasonably clear that intervention by the military could take milder and more corrective form of clearly conveyed reluctance or thereafter, refusal to act in accordance with the government, keeping the exchanges within the government machinery. It has therefore to have a good and effective mix of conditioned and condign power endowed to it legitimately by the State, with duly recognised sources of power so as to enable the military to effectively use that power for the legitimate purpose of "winning support for its perception of the public good" in national security issues. With such power, sources, and purpose in place Finer's definition of military intervention, even in its wilder form, may not prove to be such a sacrilege in a democracy.

MILITARY MAN'S DILEMMA

In all this churn-up the military man's dilemma revolves round the following :-

- (a) Whom is the military serving the nation and society or the government in power? Is the civilian authority indeed unquestionable in the dangerously deteriorating situation and its orders justified therein? (A potent situation came up before the military in 1975 when emergency was clamped and imposition of martial law was being contemplated by the Indira Gandhi Government. Contrary to what Stephen Cohen says in his book "The Indian Army", a very large section of army officers was unhappy with the political step and disapproved of it in their conversation in the messes and informal gatherings).
- (b) What if the military splits in its opinion on the policies and actions of government, and the need to take a stand?
- (c) Are the military's perception, insight and assessment of govern-

ment's policies and actions correct, objective and truly reflective of national security interests? Are its inputs and their processing adequate, unbiased and reliable, justifying the contemplated stand?

(d) How genuinely and wholesomely democratic are the country's political system and government set-up to qualify for being accepted as unquestionably superior to the military even when the top political leader and head of the government acts more as an autocratic dictatorial boss than as a mature senior among equals in the articulate, upright, responsive, firm-willed cabinet? What is the military to do when the organisation, the system, the institutions and people abrogate their national security responsibility, and mortgage the same to one individual or his select coterie?

(e) Obedience is ingrained in the military mind. It is brought up in an ethos of accepting every task as a challenge and throwing in body-mind-and-soul in completing it, whatever the cost, without questioning. The military man knows that if he says no there will be many more in the hierarchy who will simply step in into his job. Therefore taking "no" for an answer or saying no to the given task is not in his normal equipment of military character. Hence the hesitation to say no.

MILITARY MAN'S RESPONSE

There are a few basic ingredients which need to be built up to evolve a military response in an effective, smooth and legitimate manner, obviating or minimising drastic steps such as are discussed, more in heat than in a bit of light.

First, at the apex is what Samuel Huntington calls "objective" civilian control over the military, where a legitimate civil authority must respect, heed and even encourage the differences cropping up between it and the military professionals, as against "subjective" control where the differences are blurred as civilian and professional values merge, and the latter starts being expected to be "committed" to the former.

Second, legitimate avenues must be provided for the military to articulate its military and professional advice to the highest national institutions -- the Cabinet, the Parliament and, finally, the people, in the context of the ascending degree of differences with the civil authority.

Third, the service Chief's institutional right of access to the ultimate decision-making authorities and his closer integration with the decision-making

processes relating to national security, which were denied to him consequent to the amendment of the Army (Navy and Air Force) Act(s) in 1955, as described by PR Chari¹³ must be restored.

Four, it is vitally necessary to create an effective National Security Council with necessary representation and participation of the military, and provision for articulation of its views. This would also help the government to moderate overplayed or overenthusiastic military view.

With these ingredients in place the need for the heat and hassle of "Standing upto" Putting the foot down", "Putting in papers" (i.e., quitting in protest or helplessness) etc. will be considerably reduced. If all the above mentioned provisions fail then the military chief must quit. In which eventuality the major national policy and decision making institutions, the parliament and the people would have known the military view and professional advice. In the event of such a fair arrangement, the government should have no qualms about relieving the military chief and its causing demoralisation of the soldiery. That is not quite the military chemistry. The military is an hierarchical system, where the loss of one commander is filled by another. The system is "impersonal enough to take individual loss, including the Chief's, in the stride.

The first mismatch in the civil-military understanding occurred in 1948 over the pursuance of operations in Kashmir with the government agreeing for a ceasefire prematurely, even when the Indian military had a clear advantage over Pakistan in bringing about a military situation of far-reaching political decisiveness. Neither was the government well versed in handling military force for long-term objectives, nor was the military mature, persuasive and forceful enough to convince the government of the optimisation of force application in the nation's long term security interests. The next dissonance was in 1960 with the resignation of Gen Thimayya and its immediate retraction on the advice of the political superior. This uneducated civilian predominance in military matters culminated in the thoughtless "Throw out the Chinese" order given by the Prime Minister in 1962. Jawaharlal Nehru's gigantic political stature browbeat and overawed the fledgling military to the detriment of national security.

A political pragmatist, starting as a nonentity, picking up pearls of political-military commonsense and its possibilities in the security affairs of a nation at war, devoid of the burden of aura and larger-than-life foreign policy pre-occupation was astonishingly quick in seeing through the 1965 India-Pak military considerations and agreeing to the military's choice of opening a counter-front in Punjab against Pakistan's pressure in Kashmir.

The political and the military leaders showed how quickly they could, and did, learn the civil-military game of relationship and complementarity. It was bold enough of the Army Chief to suggest the strategy of opening a front across international Indo-Pak border, and bolder on the part of the political chief to agree to it, all within three years of Chinese aggression and one year of Nehru's death.

This civil military understanding at the top reached its high point in the 1971 Indo-Pak War to liberate Bangladesh, where the Army Chief said firmly "No" to the political superior's demand of a quick retaliatory military response in April 1971. Not only was the military's "No" well taken by the political superior, but also the government went the whole hog of preparing a politically, economically, diplomatically and morally conducive and advantageous strategic environment for the military to do its job.

What role the military played in the government's contemplated attempt to impose martial law after emergency in 1975 is not adequately known. But the sands under the high castle of civil-military understanding had started running out by 1979-80 in the Punjab where mindless political skulduggery was fathering violence and terrorism. What advice, caution and warning the military gave to the government on its policies and actions in Punjab are not known, although the Corps and Army commanders then were uneasy and apprehensive, even agitated in private. The military apparently remained a silent spectator, till one fine day in June 1984 it was ordered to storm the Golden Temple at Amritsar - Operation Blue Star. For this tragedy the military must take its share of blame for not warning the government forcefully enough, well enough in advance and for not finding alternatives. So it must for what has happened in Kashmir and Assam. This aloofness, reluctance to tender military advice unless asked for and indifference to government policy-making and executive action are what Stephen Cohen calls "negative" contribution of the Indian military to its nation's development.¹⁵

Operation Pawan was a unique military advice. The military showed itself raring to go at anybody in its enthusiasm of being a major instrument of the government which was wanting to project its power in the region. Whether it was going at the Sri Lankan military or at the LTTE mattered little to it. A military advice which was wrong in its aim, methodology, timing and self-assessment as a major government instrument encouraged a presumptuous government to undertake half-baked ventures in a slipshod manner with precipitate haste. The government accepted the military's advice that suited it, through its wrong understanding of the military, the soldier and of going to war in a foreign country against virtually both its government and people.

CONCLUSION

Civil-military relations are what a polity in its intellectual, moral and organisational spheres evolves to marry political needs with military force in order to obtain delivery of advantageous results in maintaining national security in its external and internal commitments and compulsions. For harmonious and effective relations the civil authority has to be well aware of the military, its nature, character, utility and limitations, and accommodative of its professional advice, while the military must understand politics, social and economic issues, and internal and international considerations, and develop adequate intellectual and moral strength to forthrightly and honestly project its view and professional advice in keeping with the developing security situation or developing situations with security connotation. In the political, organisational and administrative evolution of the government and its institutions there is a need to provide legitimate avenues and endow adequate power to the military to articulate its view, caution, and warn (in that order) the civil authority in its ascending echelon in step with the deteriorating security situation. It should be empowered to approach the Cabinet, the Parliament and, lastly, the People themselves. That will considerably reduce the strains of forcing the military into a confrontationist stand either early in the process or too late, of "taking a stand" or "putting in papers".

Saying "No" to a task is out of the military's character and professional upbringing. In the history of civil-military relations in most democracies instances of the military leader saying no are indeed rare. It may be because of better and effective accommodation of military view, due regard shown and necessary value assigned to it by the civil authority in its government institutions like committees, ministries, parliament and public relations. In our country this kind of institutions, response and value need to be developed in view of the violence we have been having since independence and the security threat it has imposed.

NOTES

1. Indian Express, 25 Nov. 91
2. Indian Express, 15 Dec. 91
3. Indian Express, 6 Jan. 92
4. Tribune, 2 Sep 91
5. "The Soldier and the State". by Samuel Huntington.
6. "The Armed Services and Society". Edited by Welfe and Erickson.
7. "Military Ethics : Guidelines For Peace and War", by Fotion and Elfstrom.
8. "The Soldier and The State". by Samuel Huntington.

9. "The Man on Horesback", by SE Finer (author's quote of Moris Janowitz).
10. "Anatomy of Power". by J K Galbraith.
11. "The Indian Army : Its Contribution to the Development of A Nation", b Stephen Cohen.
12. "The Man on Horseback". by S E Finer.
13. "Civilian Control Over the Military" by P R Chari, Indian Defence Review Oct. 91.
14. "Anatomy of Power", by J K Galbraith.
15. "Indian Army" by Stephen Cohen.

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