Civil Military Relations: A fresh Appraisal

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Abstract:

In any political system, the presence of the military is due both to historical as well as pragmatic reasons. The state must either monopolize the force of the community or risk surrender to whoever can muster counterforce for its overthrow. The logic of coercion and defence dictates monopoly of force. From primitive society to the modern, the state has resorted to force as a component of its essential authority. Political thinkers since Plato have sought answer to the eternal question, "Who will guard the guardians?" This study of civil-military relations has remained the central question engaging scholars through the ages. Although civil-military relations is a very broad subject, encompassing the entire range of relationships between the military and civilian society at all levels the study largely focuses on the control or direction of the military by the highest civilian authorities in nation-states.

This paper tries to look at the multiple dimensions of the civil military relations in general and try and relate it to the challenges it poses in the Indian context.

Key Words: Nation-state, Logic of Coercion, Legitimacy, Strategic Decision-making, Normative Field, Subjective Control, Objective Control, Apolitical, Absent Dialogue.

Civil Military Relations (or CMR) in a broad sense refers to the relationship between military organizations and civil society, military organizations and other government bureaucracies, and leaders and the military. It is an extremely significant aspect of a state as academic studies of civil–military relations offer key insights into the debates over the proper relationship between the military and the government, the military and society, and society's role in overseeing government foreign and military policy. Civil Military Relations incorporates a diverse, often normative field, which moves within and across management, social science and policy scales.[1] In a narrower sense, it describes the relationship between the civil authority of a given society and its military authority. "The goal of any state is to harness military professional power to serve vital national security interests, while guarding against the misuse of power that can threaten the well-being of its people."[2] Studies of civil-military relations often rest on a normative assumption that it is preferable to have the ultimate responsibility for a country's strategic decision-making to lie in the hands of the civilian political leadership (i.e. civilian control of the military) rather than a military (a military dictatorship).

In any political system, the presence of the military is due both to historical as well as pragmatic reasons. The state must either monopolize the force of the community or risk surrender to whoever can muster counterforce for its overthrow. The logic of coercion and defence dictates monopoly of force. From primitive society to the modern, the state has resorted to force as a component of its essential authority. Force is inextricably linked to the moral, political processes. The state uses force in its various manifestations according to the exigencies of circumstances; i.e., policing the society defending the country by military strength or using the military or Para military forces in emergencies. However, there is always a danger that normal political process may get distorted when the state tends to use force very frequently and

the military is called out of the barracks to deal with domestic political incidents every now and then. [3] At the same time, a disenchanted, demoralized and a corrupt force poses a constant threat to the civilian rule. Emboldened by the fragility of civilian politics and lack of legitimacy of an ongoing regime, the armed forces emerged on several occasions the savior of law and order and the nation.

A paradox lies at the centre of traditional civil-military relations theory. The military, an institution designed to protect the polity, must be strong enough to threaten the society it serves. A military take-over or coup is a worst-case example. Ultimately, the military must accept that civilian authorities have the "right to be wrong".[4] In other words, they may be responsible for carrying out a policy decision they disagree with. Civilian supremacy over the military is a complicated matter. The rightness or wrongness of a policy or decision can be ambiguous. Civilian decision makers may be impervious to corrective information. The relationship between civilian authorities and military leaders must be worked out in practice.[5]

The principal problem they examine, however, is empirical: to explain how civilian control over the military is established and maintained.[6] In the broader sense it examines the ways society and military intersect or interact and includes topics such as the integration of veterans into society, methods used to recruit and retain service members, and the fairness and efficacy of these systems, the integration of minorities, women, and the other communities into the military, the behaviour and consequences of private contractors, the role of culture in military organizations, voting behaviour of soldiers and veterans, and the gaps in policy preferences between civilians and soldiers.[7]

Political thinkers since Plato have sought answer to the eternal question, "Who will guard the guardians?" This study of civil-military relations has remained the central question engaging scholars through the ages. Although civil-military relations is a very broad subject, encompassing the entire range of relationships between the military and civilian society at all levels the study largely focuses on the control or direction of the military by the highest civilian authorities in nation-states. [8]

Political scientists, as distinct from historians, tend to look for patterned generalizations of cause and effect. Political scientists seek not so much to describe what happened in a particular instance as to explain what happens in general and, if possible, predict what is likely to happen in the next (similar) case, given the ceteris paribus (other things remaining the same) constraint. As distinct from sociologists, political scientists focus primarily on institutions of political control. Factors of direct concern to sociologists, for instance, the integration of the military with society, are of interest only insofar as they may relate causally to the primary political question of who decides what, when, how, and with what effect. Sociologists and historians would no doubt look at the issue of civil military relations in a much more different manner and give more prominence to the degree of social interaction and the impact there of.

Even though the relations between civilian and martial spheres, broadly construed, have preoccupied political philosophers for thousands of years, the modern intellectual history largely dates to the pre–World War II literature on antimilitarism. The second large wave of literature came in the early Cold War period, as American social scientists struggled to reconcile the need for a permanent and large standing army with America's traditional suspicions of the threats to liberty posed by standing armies (Kerwin (1948), Smith (1951), Lasswell (1950), Ekirch (1956), Mills (1956), Millis et al (1958). Huntington's landmark study, The Soldier and the State (1957), was the capstone to this early work, and most of what has been written since has been an explicit or implicit response to his argument. [9]

In the 'Soldier and the State, [10] Huntington started off with the thesis that the civil military relations assumes significance in a modern state with the emergence of the officer corps as a professional body. The members of the military profession have professional competence within their own field. But they are not quite equipped to deal with the larger goals of state policy. The problem of the civil military relationship thus boils down to the issue of relationship between the expert and the politician. Civilian control involves subordination of the autonomous military profession to the specific ends of policy. The statesman acknowledges the integrity and specialisation of the military profession, while the military officer remains politically neutral and as a matter of course, submits himself to political guidance. Changes in the civil military relations take place only when this balance is disturbed. [11]

After Huntington, the field split along two distinct tracks. The first and arguably more fruitful was a sociologically oriented examination of the military, first in the United States and then extending to other countries. The landmark study, Janowitz's The Professional Soldier (1960), [12] spawned literally hundreds of follow-on studies exploring the relationship between society and the armed forces. The second track was an institutionally oriented examination of postcolonial civil-military relations in developing countries, a project dominated by political and largely focused on the problem of coups; this track has spawned numerous specialty literatures considering civil-military relations in specific contexts, i.e., like in communist regimes, in ethnically divided polities, in authoritarian and post-authoritarian regimes, and so on. [13] Although this essay addresses the literature across the board, special attention is given to civil-military relations within democracies and, within that set, civil-military relations in India as it is gradually figuring out the nuances of civil military relations over the last seven decades. However, the end of the Cold War has again sparked a renewed interest in civil-military relations all across the globe much of which may turn out as theoretically ambitious as the early works of Huntington and Janowitz.

Samuel Huntington refined his views on civil military Relations in his subsequent writings on the theme. In his work 'Political Order in Changing Societies' (1968), [14] he remarked "Military reasons do not explain military intervention in politics, because the reasons for such interventions lie in the political and institutional structure of the society. Military interventions are only one specific aspect of a broader phenomenon in developing societies, where politics tends to lack autonomy, complexity, consistency and adaptability."

As seen in many of the developing societies, different types of social forces and special groups become directly involved in general politics and broader issues that affect not only their own groups but the entire society The military officers in these societies are concerned not only with their own career and service prospects but also with the broader issues of distribution of power throughout the political system. The cause of interventions in politics, thus, does not lie in the nature of military groups but in the structure of the society itself. The causes could be particularly attributed to 'the absence or weakness of effective political institutions, through which social forces could participate in politics.'

Morris Janowitz went a step further and identified four models of politico-military relations; aristocratic, democratic, totalitarian and garrison-state. Historically, the aristocratic model was prevalent prior to the industrialization and there was a virtual social and functional integration of the civilian and military elites of Western Europe. In contrast, a democratic model postulated sharp differentiation between civilian and military elites. In the democratic state, the civilian control is attained through a formal set of rules and Huntington called this 'objective control'. The totalitarian model rested on a form of 'subjective control'. This form developed in states like Germany, Russia and to some extent in Italy. A revolutionary political elite based on authoritative mass political party exercised a new type of control over the military.

This control was enforced by secret police, party members infiltrating into the military hierarchy, arming of own military units (private armies) and by controlling the system of officer selection. In this kind of a set-up, there was hardly any possibility of organizational independence of the military. The garrison-state model was originally constructed by Harold Lasswell. It spoke of a situation where the civil supremacy was weakened under conditions of continuous threat of mass warfare and international tension. The garrison-state was a new coalition where there was no direct domination of the politics by the military but the military groups directly or indirectly wielded unprecedented amounts of political and administrative power. [15]

Unique features of the Military:

After his studies on the salient characteristic features of the military, Alan Ball stated that '…the armed forces have characteristic features which distinguish them from other groups in all political systems, and these characteristics would lead one to expect that the military would intervene more frequently than it does.' While examining the role of the military in the political process, he emphasized on two variables; the political attitude of the military and the nature of the political system. While the structure of the armed forces (army, navy, air force), their centralization, hierarchy, their discipline, their separate barrack life, their uniforms, their specific training, orientation, symbols, and their monopoly over weapons and violence provides the military with organizational superiority, their intervention in the political process depends on the nature of the political system. There are many variations in military interventionism. In most cases, it is subject to their capacity to intervene and their motive to intervene. [16]

Conditions also vary depending on the political system prevailing in a country. In liberal democratic countries with a long tradition of democratic institutions, direct military intervention is highly unlikely. So is the case with totalitarian or dictatorial states. The military is usually not in a position to disobey the civil authorities. At times, the armed forces may seem to exercise an undue influence in decision-making processes but as contemporary history shows, they have been very few and far in between. [17] This, of course, does not imply that liberal democracies are not threatened by military challenges.

Direct interference of the Military in politics:

Direct interference takes place in political systems where powers of both the civil and military components are evenly matched. In those situations, the military acts as a powerful pressure group and creates an environment for either a change of government or compels the ruling faction to follow a particular course of political action. This also becomes possible when the legitimate government is confronted with insurmountable odds and is besotted with a history of mismanagement of international problems with a weak hold over the nation. [18]

Of course, military intervention in political processes in many areas of the world in the last so many decades, have had specific indigenous (region-specific) factors responsible for their population easily accepting and approving of military interventions in the political processes. Collapse of the political systems in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand in south-east Asia during different phases of their national history have been a product their peculiar national cultures and traditions. [19]

Total Military Control:

Total military control of the affairs of the state takes place as a result of the creation of typical situations. While collapse of the Civilian government and their hold over the political system is the most important cause of the process of total military take-over, in a hierarchical and rift-ridden traditional society, the military comfortably captures power without any effective resistance as it happens to be the most

organized and cohesive unit of the society to take advantage of the situation. Collapse of the civilian governments in our immediate neighborhood provides us ample proof of the factors that have encouraged the rise of military dictatorship. They have also demonstrated how, having come to power through military coup, the dictators have manipulated the numerous political factions to remain in power and legitimize their hold over the political system. [20]

The Civil Military Relations or the CMR needs to be analyzed in the backdrop of the three variables: i.e., society, economy and politics. Factors behind the military intervention in states cannot be generalized as multiple factors interact with each other to create the situation for a military take-over. Inability of the civilian government to address the aspirations of the people, nature of the political system, motives of the military (especially the personal motives of the coup leaders), close nexus between the economic power and the military, level of socio- economic development, population and the geo-political location of the country provoke the military differently in different situations. So it is not easy to look for the exact factors that encourage the military to intervene directly or indirectly in a civilian set-up.

Indian context:

In the Indian context, although the Indian democracy has successfully withered formidable challenges in its post-colonial history, most of the scholarly works on civil military relations have generally dwelt upon the factors as to why there has been a lack of military intervention in the political process. India has had a strong 1.3 million army and has fought numerous wars in its 70 plus years of independence. Hence the civilian control of such a huge chunk of organized military could have always posed a grave challenge to the political system. While it may have had a lot to with the maturing of Indian democratic traditions, a part of the credit must also be placed at the professional nature of the Indian military which has thoroughly internalized the idea of a firm civilian control over the military. This also, to a great extent, has been possible owing to the nation-building process that India went through while fighting for its independence from the colonial rule. Of course, it would be more interesting to look at the possibility of areas of contention and contestation (if any?) between the civilian and military and to how have the relations between the civil and the military evolved over these seven decades.

India has had a harmonious civil military relationship compared to many other colonies that emerged from centuries of foreign rule. This is partly due to the peaceful transfer of power, legitimacy of the political system which is validated by regular elections, participation of political parties, strong civilian institutions like an independent judiciary and a relatively free press, which has been responsible for the civilian control of the military. Further, civilian control over the military has been enhanced by effective bureaucratic institutions which have been in control of the composition, organization and formulation of the responsibilities and have succeeded in keeping the military largely "apolitical". Although the experience of the neighboring countries has been frightening, civilian supremacy in India has never been seriously questioned. [21]

In establishing the norm of civilian supremacy in the new republic, Jawaharlal Nehru played a key role. Even before he held the levers of the State, Nehru realized the importance of keeping the military subordinate to the political authority. On the eve of Independence, the army's Commander-in-Chief had issued orders to keep the public away from the flag hoisting ceremony. Rescinding this order, Nehru wrote to General Rob Lockhart: "In any policy that is to be pursued in the Army or otherwise, the views of the Government of India and the policy they lay down must prevail. If any person is unable to lay down that policy he has no place in the Indian Army." This set the tone for civil-military interaction in the years ahead.

An aspect that has often been highlighted has been the lack of expertise on part of the politician and the bureaucrats in the military matters. The political class depends on the bureaucracy for implementation of the policy decisions with regard to the military but the bureaucrats also lack in-depth knowledge with regard to military matters. (Of course, exceptions will always be there). So, there is a situation where there is an 'absent dialogue' [22] characterizing the civil military relations, indicating a lack of communication between the politicians, bureaucrats and the military officers. K Subrahmanyam appropriately sums up the situation by stating that this directly translates into a system where 'politicians enjoy power without any responsibility, bureaucrats wield power without any accountability and the military assumes responsibility without any direction.' [23]

The military has long maintained that this arrangement has enabled bureaucratic dominance of—not to say monopoly over—defence policymaking. The recent seem to move towards providing the military a prominent seat at the high table of decision-making. Similarly, the new reforms if initiated appear well positioned to deliver on longstanding, if also contentious, goals of integration—including the creation of integrated theatre commands.

On the issue of professional military education and training, Srinath Raghvan has a very important observation: He states that it is important that the military should develop the ability to operate in the new domain of policy making. Military is deeply deficient on this count. This is not only because the military was kept out of this space, but because the armed forces' conception of professional military education has been narrow, unimaginative and crimped. None of our military educational institutions offers any serious training in international relations or economics, history or public policy. They continue to prepare officers primarily for operational and logistical roles, and have no conception of serious academic training. Unless there is a thorough overhaul of professional military education, the military will be unable meaningfully to work the new structures that are taking shape. Just as we looked to other countries to make the case for integrated structures of policy-making, we must learn from their willingness to put their officers through serious education and prepare them for serving as policy-makers as well as soldiers. [24]

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8. The symbiotic relationship between the civil and the military derives from the agency inherent in civilization. We form communities precisely because we cannot provide for all our needs and therefore must depend on other people or institutions to do our bidding. Civilization involves delegation, assigning decision making from the individual to the collective (in the form of a leader or leaders) and consigning the societal protection function from the leader to specialists or institutions responsible for violence. Peter D. Feaver, Civil Military Relations, Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci. 1999. 2:211.41, www.annualreviews.org.

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15. The military retained its organisational independence so long as it made appropriate alliances with civil political factions. Janowitz, Morris, The Military in the Political Development of New Nations., The University of Chicago Press, 1964, p.113.

16. Amos Perlmutter, Political Roles and Military Rulers, Frank Cass, London, 1981, pp. 24-35.

17. In exceptional circumstances, states do rely on military support to continue civilian control over the population. A bright example of this is the overlapping of a complex military machine, foreign policy, strategy, military budget and the appeal to the population to contribute during Winston Churchill's tenure as the War minister during the World War days.

18. The Fourth Republic of France is a clear case in point. Political retreat in the Suez Crisis (1956) and the mishandling of the African nationalist crisis in Algeria (1958) had created a situation where no important section of the French society was willing to defend the regime. Army had virtually reached a position of open defiance of the government. De Gaulle provided an alternative source of authority which the civilians as well as the army could appeal. Alan R Ball, Modern Politics and Government, P.233.

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20. Field Marshall Ayub Khan in the 1960s, General Zia-ul-Huq in 1970s & 1980s, General Parvez Musharaf in the 1990s are clear examples of the military capturing total power in in the state and ruling under cover of a civilian government in Pakistan. Maj General Zia-ur-Rehman and General H M Ershad also tried the same in Bangladesh, in the 1970s and 1980s respectively.

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