



## INDIAN DEFENSE AT THE CROSSROADS

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**L**OOKING back on the 17 years of India's independence, one may say that the winter of 1962 marked a watershed in the development of Indian defense. Then, Communist China launched an attack on India—an unprovoked, massive aggression which had a profound impact on India's outlook on her own security and on measures to safeguard that security.

It is not that India's armed forces had to go into action for the first

time. In fact, they had been on the alert, or had taken part in several small operations, for most of the years since India had gained her independence. What the Red Chinese attack did do was to drive home the gravity and dimensions of the security problem.

Since that time, India has been rebuilding her military power, a process which is still going on. At the same time, it is well to remember that in the rebuilding process, political and strategic considerations are playing as

important a part as the development of the armed forces.

### The Background

On the political plane, India had, prior to the Communist Chinese invasion in 1962, long pursued a policy of abstention from power blocs and military pacts. The presumption was that this would save her from cold war and military entanglements. With Mainland China, in particular, she had entered into a specific pact of *panch-sheel*—five principles of peace and coexistence.

While keeping out of the vortex of power, she pursued nonalignment, treading the middle path. If there was something she shunned with all her heart, it was war. Among other things, war would have clamped down on India's ambitious five-year plans, vital for her economic advance and general welfare. Relying on a diplomacy of peace and noninvolvement, India concentrated on development at home and kept low the tempo of defense buildup.

Defense strategy embraced two situations—threat by sea and threat by land. The former did not exist. The Indian Peninsula is surrounded by the Indian Ocean, where no mighty fleets ply as they do in the western Pacific, the Mediterranean Sea, or the North Atlantic Ocean. Across the Bay of Bengal is Burma, a friendly country. This vast watery domain enjoyed immunity from disturbance, particularly because the friendly British and United States Navies and Air Forces

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could dominate it. India did not look much beyond this domain.

In contrast to the sense of security by sea, India had premonitions of danger from across her land borders. It has been said that prior to the attack by Red China, India took little notice of a threat from the direction of the Himalayas. This is not correct. India had her disillusionment on this score as early as 1951 when Mao's hordes ravished Tibet, and again in 1954 when Premier Chou En-lai first raised his border claims. The flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959 further added to the disillusionment. Two years before Red China struck, in fact, India had begun strengthening her border defenses.

But India did not adequately take note of the Communist designs and military buildup, and her faith in *panchsheel* was much too exaggerated. Besides, between Mainland China and India there lies the barrier of a mountain complex, including the great Himalayas, about 4,000 kilometers long and some 240 to 475 kilometers wide, across which military operations were considered unlikely.

### Suspicious of Insecurity

Political and strategic considerations did not pose an immediate, serious confrontation with Communist China, but did breed suspicions of insecurity from Pakistan. India and Pakistan had failed to hit it off well, despite territorial separation and a sharing of the subcontinent. Past animosities, mostly religious based, did not die, and to these were added other disputes, particularly over Kashmir.

A substantial portion of India's armed forces, as of Pakistan's was concentrated on the common frontier in the northwest. But apart from two years in the 1950's, there was no sin-

gle period in the postindependence era when India and Pakistan appeared to be falling afoul of each other to the point of sword. In fact, there were

countries which had vast defense commitments. After adjusting for price changes, India spent no more during those eight years than she had spent



The main wing of the National Defense Academy, India's leading interservice training school

hopes of reconciliation based upon ancient and common bonds.

#### Defense Before the Attack

From 1954 to 1962, India spent, on an average, 560 million dollars annually on defense. This was not a particularly large sum, considering that even a small country like the Netherlands was spending about the same amount. For 1962-63, the defense budget was 750 million dollars—one-fifth the size of France's, a little less than one-sixth of Britain's, one-fiftieth that of the Soviet Union, and one-seventieth of the United States.

It is unfair, of course, to compare India with those relatively wealthy

out of her own exchequer during the eight years immediately preceding World War II—when she also enjoyed the security provided by the British Empire, of which she was a part.

India should have, and could have, spent more, but the moral lies in her sense of priorities and faith in peace.

And so, after independence, India did not maintain armed forces which befitted her size. While official figures have not been published, it may be said that the figures cited in the January 1962 *Military Review* would be reasonable.<sup>1</sup> The total strength of In-

<sup>1</sup> Major Edgar O'Balance, "The Strength of India," *Military Review*, January 1962, pp 25-35.

dia's armed forces was around half a million men—a large majority of whom were in the army.

The army consisted of a dozen divisions, with smaller elements of armored and mountain troop units. Three or four mountain brigade groups formed the spearhead for mountain and winter warfare, but they were not fully developed. There were less than two dozen fighter and bomber squadrons in the air force, and these were equipped with *Canberras*, *Hawker Hunters*, *Mystères*, *Liberators*, *Gnats*, and *Vampires*—all subsonic, and most acquired between 1940 and 1956. The air-transport units were equipped with *Dakotas*, *C-119's*, *Ilyushins*, *An-12's*, and helicopters. The navy had one aircraft carrier, a few destroyers and frigates, and a number of miscellaneous craft.

India had nearly 24 ordnance factories producing small arms and ammunition, clothing, and miscellaneous goods. Jeeps and trucks had begun to be assembled. Altogether, the ordnance items were of old vintage and some machines were outdated. Plans had been made for the establishment of a tank factory. India had not yet turned out a good combat or transport plane, although several were at various stages of development. There were few plans to construct additional warships.

### Battles of the Border

The 1962 Sino-Indian battles along the border have been described in some detail.<sup>2</sup>

In the North-East Frontier Agency, Chinese Communist forces came down the mountain slopes for 160 kilometers; but in Ladakh, they advanced

only a few kilometers. About 90,000 Communist Chinese troops were engaged, and at least as many more were ready for commitment.

Indian troops numbered 30,000; they were overwhelmed. Indian reinforcements were hampered partly by poor logistics and partly because of the Pakistan business. India asked for military aid from Great Britain and the United States and got it promptly; the American airlift played a key role. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization expressed sympathy. The Soviet bloc countries, particularly the Soviet Union, gave sympathy and limited aid. Subsequent disclosures indicated that Moscow had asked Peking not to force a showdown.

The fighting lasted only a month. Communist China declared a cease-fire unilaterally. But this short period is by no means a measure of the profound long-range repercussions on India, her government, or her armed forces which have emanated from the fighting.

### Political Situation

Any political appraisal which bears on national security is a complex task, being the amalgam of a large number of factors and situations, some tangible, others intangible. So far as India is concerned, the postures of her neighbors and the attitudes of the principal powers, particularly the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain, are important. East-West relations, as well as transformations now underway in the power blocs, are also important.

Among her neighbors, Mainland China—with her overweening ambitions, enormous potential, and avowed faith in the cult of force as an instrument of political purpose—causes India the gravest concern. India ex-

<sup>2</sup> Leo E. Rose, "Conflict in the Himalayas," *Military Review*, February 1963, pp 3-15, and Wing Commander Maharaj K. Chopra, "The Himalayan Border War: An Indian Military View," *Military Review*, May 1963, pp 8-16.

pects at least three kinds of pressure from Red China in the future:

- Threat of another attack, particularly if India tries to regain her lost territory.

- The creation of antagonism between India and her neighbors.

- A cold war against India's development programs, institutions, and

tween herself on one hand, and the United States and Great Britain on the other, are powerful and not likely to give way in the near future.

#### Tensions Are Eased

In India's power equation, the Soviet Union now appears as a factor of greater significance than before. Ever since Cuba, there seems to have been



Man continues to be an important element in mountain logistics

ideology. The late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said more than once that he did not envisage an early end to this struggle.

Despite depressing developments in southeast Asia, India's assurance of security from the direction of the Indian Ocean seems unimpaired, and her faith in the United States and, to some extent, British naval and air-power in this area remains. The bonds of common interest and sentiment be-

some easing of tension between the West and the Soviet bloc. In particular, there has been a *détente* between the Soviet Union and the United States which, although it has not wiped out all the frictions, seems of sufficient warrant for India to hope that there will be no major conflict in the near future, thereby giving her a peace which she wants so badly.

Too, India does not expect any Soviet hostility because she is getting

military assistance from the West. Of even greater importance, perhaps, is the violent rift which has erupted between Moscow and Peking, and its implications of Soviet support to India against Mainland China.

From outside appearances, not much seems to have happened to force India from her policy of nonalignment. Yet, this is not completely true. The fact is that even nonalignment has shed off its old slough. India is nonaligned to the Soviet bloc and the Western bloc, but is hostile to the chip of the old East bloc—Red China. This shows that in the last analysis, nonalignment is only a policy and not a principle, and that its concept and application must conform to the changing needs of the time.

### Strategic Factors

One may say that Indian strategy today has at least six important aspects:

- In the global setting and in terms of the major threat to her security, American power to contain Communist China is important. This is principally applicable to Red China's eastern flank. Her northern and western flanks are under Soviet pressure. India's principal task is to contain Red China on the latter's southern flank.

- India understands that regardless of outside assistance, the responsibility to defend her northern border falls mainly on her own shoulders. She also understands that only she and no other southern neighbor of Communist China has the resources to discharge this responsibility.

- Indian security from the direction of the Indian Ocean is unimpaired, but it is realized that critical instability is developing in southeast Asia.

- The barricades around Mainland

China have been breached at places. India wants urgently to plug her defense gaps and build her own strength.

- As things have developed, the great northern border—from the Pamir Knot to the India-Tibet-Burma trijunction—needs a thorough look in all aspects which affect tactics and strategy. In this border zone, three sectors are of critical importance: Kashmir Valley, Nepal, and the corridor joining Assam with the rest of India—48 kilometers wide, between the Tibetan frontier and the Pakistan frontier, containing a railway and a pipeline.

- With the occupation of Tibet by the Red Chinese forces, the entire Indian plain from Calcutta to Amritsar, containing dense pockets of population and vital industrial centers, has fallen within striking distance of the Chinese bombers. India has no comparable advantage. In the strategic balance sheet, this calls for emphasis on defense more than attack.

### Five-Year Defense Plan

Indian defense reorganization began almost immediately after the reverses on the border, the real reasons for which have only now begun to appear. The Indian Government could put only a division and a half in the field, a reflection on combat strength as well as transport capability. Troops were not well trained for mountain warfare and required considerable acclimatization. Intelligence was unsatisfactory, weapons were poor, and inexperienced leaders could not cope with the guerrilla tactics practiced by the Red Chinese.

On the other hand, where the troops had adequate weapons, they proved themselves more than a match for the Communist Chinese. The Indian Government did not take long to realize

that there was a desperate need for more money, men, weapons, and ideas, more efficient logistics and channels of communications, and quicker administrative procedures.

India is now rebuilding her defenses on a five-year plan. The army is to

techniques are being introduced in the existing factories. India has begun, or will begin in the near future, to produce in quantity 7.62-millimeter semiautomatic rifles, improved carbines to replace *Sten* guns, modified light machineguns and new heavy



*All photos courtesy of author*

#### Indian fighter bombers

consist of 825,000 men, and the air force, 45 squadrons. The navy will remain at its existing strength. The army and air force will be equipped with modern weapons, and some of the naval vessels will be replaced. India will establish modernized production facilities to ensure reasonable self-sufficiency in arms, and will construct, as well as improve, lines of communication in the border areas.

Six more ordnance factories are being established and are expected to go into production next year. Modern

mortars, mountain guns, and anti-aircraft guns. Ammunition for these weapons, as well as semisolvant propellents for rockets, are also due for production. The number of trucks, carriers, and jeeps has been increased.

The heavy vehicle factory will make a medium tank especially designed for the Indian Army by a British firm. The basic model is the British *Chieftain* 47-ton tank which is fitted with a 120-millimeter gun, two 7.62-millimeter machineguns, and an infrared searchlight for night firing. Modifica-

tions in this are expected. As a tank of this size would not be suitable for mountain warfare, the manufacture of a lighter variety will also be undertaken.

### Aircraft Industry Expanded

The aircraft industry is now being expanded. Hindustan Aircraft, Limited, is the major center, handling presently half a dozen projects including the *Gnat* jet fighter, the *Alouette III* helicopter under license from Sud-Aviation of France, and the *HF-24* jet fighter. The last, which has just become operational with the Indian Air Force, is a showpiece, a fighter of sonic speed, but capable of modification to supersonic.

A more powerful fighter, the Soviet *MiG-21*, is also to be produced. The performance of the *MiG-21* has not been officially released, but it is considered generally comparable to that of the US *Starfighter F-104G*—speed 2,330 kilometers per hour, rate of climb 12,190 meters per minute, ceiling 27,430 meters, one cannon, and two missiles. The Aircraft Manufacturing Depot has begun turning out the *Avro 748*, a medium transport plane.

Electronics, a rapidly growing industry, produces transmitters, air-to-air and air-to-ground communications equipment, and other material which could be used in guided missiles. The missiles are at an advanced design stage. Machine tools, cranes, conveyors and hoists, engines, and numerous engineering components are also being produced.

In connection with the defense buildup, a number of Indian missions have gone abroad—in particular, to the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. Missions from those countries have also visited India. The

search for military assistance from foreign countries has become a major government endeavor.

### Outside Aid

Under the Nassau agreement of December 1962, India received considerable material from the United States and Great Britain. Similar assistance on a yearly basis, spread over a number of years, is envisaged—probably 700 million dollars by 1968 in the shape of gifts or credits. The Soviet assistance thus far is reported to be 130 million dollars.

What matters, however, is not only money, but also the hardware, which could, indeed, be more important than the money. India needs transport planes capable of operating at high altitudes, supersonic fighter planes (until she builds her own), electronic equipment, warships, machinery for her ordnance factories, and special raw materials for certain manufactures.

Securing foreign military aid under the umbrella of nonalignment is a unique experience for India. It is also a difficult experience, because the supplying countries must weigh India's military needs, however genuine, on their own scales of availability and diplomacy which rise and fall with the changing barometer of international relations.

While it appears that no changes will be made in the organization of the high command, there has been a certain amount of reorganization at the lower echelons. Before the emergency, there were three army commands—the Western, Eastern, and Southern—formed on a geographical basis. The Eastern Command has since been split into two, giving rise to a new Central Command. This change is obviously border orientated, so that three instead of two commands cover

the border—an arrangement necessitated by the border's vastness and critical sectors.

A similar reorganization of air commands has taken place so that, instead of two, there are now three operational air commands—the Western, Central, and Eastern. The Indian Air Force has, in addition, two more commands—Maintenance and Training.

In the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, a new naval establishment has come into being, symbolizing the resurgent consciousness on India's part of her naval interests.

### **Manpower Is Abundant**

Manpower is the kingpin of any expansion scheme of the armed forces. With a population of 480 million, India has had no difficulty in recruiting personnel in requisite numbers, even though there is no conscription. Special measures have been adopted, however, to hasten the process, to get hold of advanced types of technical personnel, and to build a firm personnel base for the future.

Perhaps the most potent step in this connection has been the reorganization of the National Cadet Corps. Presently one million strong, the corps consists of school and university students who are given basic military training as a part of their education. It is immensely popular among the youth.

The composition and structure of the three services have also been affected, although the impact is more visible in the army than in the air force or navy. In the expanded army of some 25 divisions, there will be six to eight mountain divisions equipped with light pieces of artillery and automatic weapons and possessing increased mobility through light ve-

hicles, animal transport, and aircraft. Weapons pose the key problem for such divisions, and a newly established Directorate of Combat Development will handle this.

Fresh thinking is also being given to the structure of the infantry division which now consists of three brigades of three battalions each and has a strength of 20,000 men. Does this organization satisfy the requirements of command and mobility under the present fighting conditions? Is the proportion of combat elements to support elements—now 50-50—adequate? It has been interesting to read views of service personnel on this subject.

### **Communications Strengthened**

Along the border, surface lines of communication as well as air communications are being strengthened. Mountainous, jungle infested, and remote, the border, for hundreds of years, has seen nothing more than narrow tracks. Since 1962 more than 4,800 kilometers of roads have been constructed both in the northwest and in the northeast, and a beginning has been made to extend the rail network. As things are, however, and for a considerable time to come, air communications will play a key rôle in border logistics. Airstrips in Ladakh and in the North-East Frontier Agency have grown in numbers, taking their forms from the one at Leh which, at an 11,000-foot altitude, is one of the finest of its kind.

What kind of military power, then, is India building? India has renounced the making of nuclear weapons, even though she does have the necessary knowledge and a great abundance of nuclear raw material. If nuclear arms are the hallmark of big power status, then India is certainly not seeking this status.

In the near future, India's armed forces will be a million strong, which is consistent with her size and responsibilities. The primary aim is to clear the backlog of deficiencies in arms, manpower, and logistics, and to re-equip the services with modern conventional weapons.

In the present context, conventional weapons would include small arms of high speed and firepower, tanks and antitank weapons, and mines for the army; supersonic fighter planes, fast medium bombers, fast transport planes which can operate at high altitudes, helicopters, and guided missiles for the air force; and warships and submarines for the navy. India can neither afford nor use more than limited quantities of these. Since she does not yet have the national capability to manufacture them, foreign assistance of a limited character and short duration is necessary.

Does the rejuvenated defense program offer wider political and strategic possibilities than the contain-

ment of Mainland China along the Himalayan border? For instance, could India take on the burden of security in Vietnam or Laos?

In this respect, India's difficulties are many. She is up to her neck guarding her own borders and has few military resources to spare for external undertakings. Politically, military interference on the part of India would almost definitely let loose a wave of antagonism among Afro-Asian nations, and this should be avoided. India has, in the past, sent troops to areas of conflict, such as the Congo, but this has been done only at the request of the United Nations.

In the sense that political and strategic conditions go on changing, and India's reequipment and reorganization programs are not yet complete, Indian defense is at the crossroads. But India has the grip, found the direction, and struck the path of development. It should not be long before she carves a legitimate position of strength for herself.

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