Lecture 25
The Indian Armed Forces and Politics since 1947: Putting Difference in Context[1]
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Being invited to deliver the Nehru Memorial Lecture must always be an honour. In my case, it was also something of a surprise. I am primarily a historian of 18th and 19th century Britain and its empire. So the request that I address myself on this occasion to post-Independent India, and to the question of why its armed forces have remained so conspicuously and remarkably under civilian control, seemed at first perverse and excessively challenging. My doubts, however, were quickly overtaken by curiosity and for several reasons.

I was struck, to begin with - as everyone must be - by the magnitude and peculiarity of this particular Indian achievement, both in global and in regional terms. Since the Second World War, more than two thirds of all countries in Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East have experienced some degree of military intervention in, and disruption of their political processes, as have some European states such as Greece.[2] India though - for all its size, acute internal divisions and sporadic violence - has managed to avoid this fate. By contrast, India's immediate neighbours, Pakistan and Bangladesh, which shared the same experience of British imperial rule, have succumbed to periods of military rule and martial law. I was struck, too, by the fact that, while India's exceptionality in this regard is well known, it has tended to be applauded, rather than analyzed in a comparative and historical perspective and with a proper degree of detachment. Even Sunil Khilnani's recent, highly sophisticated work, *The Idea of India*, illustrates this point neatly enough. The brief entry for "military" in its index is followed immediately by the statement: "subordinated to civilian control". Although some historians and rather more political scientists have tried over the years to account for this subordination, Khilnani's remark in this same book remains valid: "there is little worthwhile on the relationship between the Indian military and politics.[3]

One cause of this has undoubtedly been excessive official secrecy. As the historian Ayesha Jalal has complained, in India, as in Pakistan and Bangladesh, it remains "extraordinarily difficult" to gain access to post-1947 government papers, and this is true in spades of those relating to the armed forces.[4] In some cases, relevant documents have been destroyed, as seems to have occurred with many of the papers generated by India's disastrous 1962 war with China. Many other documents relating to the civil-military interface have remained under wraps for longer than is warranted by considerations of national security. Thus the catalogue of the Nehru Memorial Library in New Delhi reveals that it holds various sets of correspondence dating from the 1940s about the creation of an independent Indian army. Sixty years on, these papers are still closed to readers.[5]

Yet it is varieties of complacency, rather than archival constraints, that have most inhibited analysis of Indian civil -military relations. One aspect of this is the understandably high level of patriotic pride among Indians about the professionalism of their armed forces which in practice can work to discourage critical thought and deter enquiry.[6] I was made vividly aware of this when I visited Delhi in 2003 to research this lecture. On one occasion, a senior Indian army officer to whom I was explaining my project enquired angrily why I was investigating the health of a patient - by which he meant India's armed forces - who was emphatically not sick. While two Congress politicians whom I interviewed, one elderly, the other very young, told me bemusedly that the apolitical nature or otherwise of India's military was something they had simply never thought about. Although too polite to say so, they clearly saw no reason why I was troubling myself about the issue either. Such reactions - which I encountered several times - were not, I think, prompted merely by the fact that I

was an unknown civilian female foreigner asking awkward questions. I have seen this kind of steadfast incuriosity about the relationship between the military and politics before. Indeed, I have seen it in Britain.

In this country, too, as Hew Strachan writes, "parliamentary sovereignty over the army is assumed to be the norm", so much so, that few people - whether in or outside the academy - bother to enquire how this came to be the case, or how far it really always has been the case.[7] In Britain, as in India, the relationship between civilian society and politics on the one hand, and the military on the other, is usually treated as a benevolent given, not as an important, dynamic and perplexing issue that requires serious and persistent monitoring and thought. My concern in this lecture is therefore twofold. I want first to identify and probe three of the key factors that contributed to modern India's success in keeping its military within bounds: the British imperial heritage, the nature of post-1947 Indian politics and society, and the behaviour of the Indian armed forces themselves. I want then to return to the issue of excessive complacency, and touch on some of the dangers and obfuscations that can result from this, both in India and more generally.

But let us begin with what is known and *relatively* uncontroversial: the prime factors that have enabled post-1947 India to regulate the ambitions and power of its armed forces.[8]

It has become almost a cliché that one of the more benevolent legacies of the Raj was that India was exposed to the British tradition of an apolitical military. When I asked the current Indian Defence Minister, George Fernandes, to account for his country's success in avoiding praetorian politics, this was the factor that he mentioned first.[9] There are some sound reasons for this. For their own purposes of imperial rule, and especially after the rebellion of 1857, the British sought at once to de-militarise Indian society in general, and to quarantine their Indian forces in particular away from civilian contacts and their discontents. In the main, they succeeded. With obvious and belated exceptions like the emergence of the I.N.A. (the Indian National Army) during the Second World War, and the mutinies in the Royal Indian Navy in 1946, Indian troops in the service of the British Empire remained, as has been said, "reliable, efficient, and relatively immune to external disturbances", "a society within a society".[10] And, for all their natural disapproval of this, nationalist politicians were careful after 1947 to preserve and perpetuate many of the devices deployed by the British to keep the Indian soldiery within proper bounds.

Thus India has retained the cantonment system, that is the 175 or so self-contained military townships, usually placed on the outskirts of cities, which the Raj created so as to insulate its Indian troops from what was styled "the contamination of large native centres of population".[11] Since 1947, this system of spatial organisation so as to quarantine the armed forces has actually been extended. Modern Indian air force and naval bases tend to be located well away from urban centres, and - even more than has conventionally been the case with cantonments - are out of bounds to civilians.[12] There are other continuities with former imperial military organisation. During the Raj, the British favoured regional army commands, in part as an obstacle to their Indian forces acquiring a collective political voice or momentum. Modern India follows this same policy. Before 1947, the British preferred to recruit Indian troops from rural rather than urban areas, and - at the level of the ranks - favoured the very young and uneducated, who, it was believed, were more tractable and impressionable. Modern India tends to do much the same, More than Pakistan has been able to do in recent decades, India has also preserved the British regimental system.[13]

Unlike non-aligned India, Pakistan in the 1950s joined the South East Asian Treaty Organisation and the Central Treaty Organisation, and was consequently exposed in the decades after independence to extensive American military influence. This, together with growing Islamicisation since the 1970s has arguably led to a weakening of traditional regimental ties and practices. In India, however, the

regimental system, with its culture, emblems and rituals, its pictures, mascots and silverware, and its officers' mess, is passionately adhered to, and this has undoubtedly assisted an apolitical ethos. The whole point of the regimental system, whether in Britain or India, is that the loyalty of officers and men is directed towards the lesser institution (namely, the regiment) not the greater (the army as a whole). Among other things, this serves, in both countries, as an obstacle to the military acquiring a collective and potentially disruptive political identity.

It needs recognising however that the military legacy of the Raj was ambivalent. It is likely, for instance, that when so-called Indianization of the imperial forces began after 1918, and a limited number of Indians were admitted for the first time to commissioned rank, these men learnt to be apolitical not simply by being exposed to British example, but also by running the gauntlet of a measure of British snobbery and racism. As Field Marshal Auchinleck, then Commander in Chief in India, admitted in 1946: "Prejudice and lack of manners by some - but by no means all- British officers and their wives, all went to produce a very deep and bitter feeling of racial discrimination in the mind of the most intelligent and progressive of the Indian officers", and one finds ample corroboration of this in biographies and autobiographies of those Indian officers who earned their commissions in the 1920s and '30s.[14] Yet however aggrieved they were by the attitudes of some Britons, and however anxious some were to see the British leave, the vast majority of this first generation of so of Indian officers remained staunchly and conventionally loyal. They continued up to 1947 to obey their oath to the Crown and to do their job. This was not bad training, when you think about it, in unremitting professionalism. And the new Indian nation which inherited these officers may well have benefited from these men's earlier internalisation of the need to put personal and political discontents firmly to one side, and always to serve and obey the authorities of the day

There is another caveat which needs making about the traditional, sometimes overly-positive interpretation of Britain's military legacy. Post-1947 India undeniably drew on hundreds of thousands of officers and men trained by the Raj, and still draws profitably on some of its military practices and culture. But independent India has also departed from British military conventions in significant respects. So-called British martial race policy which had led since the 1870s to recruiting being concentrated in mainly northerly regions of India was, for instance, substantially though not entirely abandoned. Some groupings much favoured by the British, such as Sikhs, are still disproportionately represented in India's armed forces. But, in general, recruits now come from a broader geographical, cultural, social and ethnic range, as well - as was always the case - from a variety of religions. This aids the military's utility in India as a national emblem and cement. More diverse recruitment arguably also insures against the Indian armed forces developing a uniform identity and agenda distinct from service to the state. (The obvious contrast here is with Pakistan, where the army is both predominantly Muslim and recruited mainly from the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province.)

In other ways, too, keeping its armed forces in line may have been assisted by what India *discarded* from the Raj, and not just by what it retained. In India, as in other parts of their empire - as at home - the British preached the virtues of an apolitical military, but they did not always practice them. The British takeover of India in the second half of the 18th and early 19th centuries was, after all, itself a military coup of sorts, staged by the private armies of the East India Company. Right up to the Second World War, when the number of Indian troops totalled some two and a half million, the military remained indispensable to British imperial control, and absorbed a disproportionate amount of the imperial budget. And throughout the imperial era, there was a succession of British males on horseback who combined major military roles in the sub-continent, with political activity there, and sometimes with involvement in British politics as well. Clive of India not only conquered Bengal in the 1750s and '60s, but also intervened directly and indirectly in both Houses of Britain's Westminster Parliament. The leading British military actor in early 19th century India, Sir Arthur

Wellesley, was the brother of its equally ambitious Governor General, Richard Wellesley, and himself went on to become Prime Minister of Britain in 1828. While, in the early 20th century, the British Commander in Chief of the Indian army, General Lord Kitchener, used his influence in Calcutta and Whitehall to unseat the civilian Viceroy, Lord Curzon. "The sardonic and sinister figure of Lord Kitchener now bestrides India", complained *The Times of India* in 1905: "we dislike his brutal and domineering methods".[15] In India then (and not just in India), the British military possessed a schizoid quality. Avowedly apolitical, at times and in practice elements within it acted as anything but.

So it was scarcely surprising - and I move on now to my second factor - that the civilian nationalists who took charge of India in 1947 wanted to pare down the military and keep it firmly in line. Many of the Congress party's leading figures at this stage, as is well known, had spent time in Oxbridge or the Inns of Court or both. They were therefore familiar with English constitutional and legal theories about the necessary subordination of the military to the civilian power; but they were also familiar with the more praetorian aspects of that British Raj against which they had struggled for so long, and intent on constructing a very different kind of India. Nehru, in particular, though careful to establish links before Independence with various sympathetic Indian officers, was always intellectually ambivalent about the military. Not simply because he associated it with the departing British and their empire, but also because of his socialism, his commitment to Gandhian ideals, and his belief in internationalism and non-alignment. After 1947, he strove for a ceiling on the Indian army of 175,000 men. Until the last few years of his life, the defence budget was kept tight, as resources were shifted to industrial development; and various constitutional and symbolic devices were adopted to underline military subordination to the civil power.[16]

Thus Nehru pointedly selected as his prime ministerial residence in New Delhi, Teen Murti House, which before 1947 had been the mansion of the British Commander in Chief in India. This particular military office was abolished, and each of the three services was given its own chief of staff (thereby of course carefully encouraging inter-service rivalry). These service chiefs, and other senior Indian officers, were expected to communicate with the politicians only through the Defence Ministry, which was headed by a civilian and staffed solely by civil servants. There were also changes in the warrants of precedence in 1951 and 1963 - and again, after Nehru's death, in 1971 - so that even the most senior army, navy and air force officers found themselves ranking below civilian grandees from the Supreme Court, the cabinet secretariat, and the various state bureaucracies.

This distancing from and diminution of things military had its downside. Nehru's choice of civilian defence ministers was repeatedly unwise, and his instinctive suspicion of those wearing uniform sometimes compromised Indian foreign policy. When in 1951 the Chief of the Army Staff, General Cariappa, delivered a lengthy warning to Nehru about Chinese military pretensions, he was bluntly told it was not his job "to tell the Prime Minister who is going to attack us where".[17] Until the crisis of 1962, defence never absorbed more than 14 per cent of central government expenditure, and the armed forces were left seriously under funded. Indian troops dispatched that year to fight the Chinese had no emergency rations; some of the lower ranks even lacked boots.[18] Nonetheless, any assessment of why civilian rule was able to take tenacious root in India has to make ample space for Nehru. His intellectual stature, prestige, political commitment, and even his patrician aura and confidence proved invaluable. So did his longevity. It is sometimes forgotten that Mohammed Ali Jinnah was just as ambivalent about the military as Nehru, and just as desirous in Pakistan to keep it in line. "You do not make national policy", he told his soldiers: "it is we, the civilians, who decide these issues". But Jinna died in 1948, only thirteen months after winning of independence. Nehru, by contrast, survived until 1964, functioning, as a fellow Congress politician famously remarked, as the "banyan tree under whose shade millions take shelter".[19] Democracy and electioneering were allowed time to become habits.

There were other respects, too, in which India in the wake of Partition found itself more advantageously positioned than Pakistan: and this helps to account for - though it did not determine - the two nations' differing military experiences. In 1947, India inherited Delhi and its bureaucracy, the core of the old colonial state; but no such continuity of centralised political infrastructure was made available to Pakistan. In Indivar Kamtekar's words: "It is an oversimplification with some truth to say that while in India independence involved restructuring a state, in Pakistan it involved building a state. Delhi existed; Islamabad had to be built"[20] Right from the start, civilian administrations in Pakistan were less secure and faced greater pressures, and therefore almost bound to give much greater prominence to strengthening the fabric of the state, than to fostering a broadly-based politics.

There were also from the outset marked socio-economic differences between the two countries. Pakistan had - and still has - a powerful, fairly exclusive landed class intimately linked to the upper echelons of its military and bureaucracy. India, though - while struggling like Pakistan with extreme poverty and inequality - possessed even in 1947 a more developed industrial sector and a bigger commercial population. Together with subsequent measures of land reform, this has assisted its comparative political stability. As Amos Perlmutter observes: "the middle classes in most praetorian states are small, weak, [and] ineffective".[21] By contrast, states with more diverse social structures and economies are generally less likely to succumb to military takeover, because their ambitious, upwardly mobile elements have access to a wider spectrum of careers and pathways to influence. One of the most vivid demonstrations both of India's occupational diversity, and of the limits of the its military, are the advertisements for marriage partners that appear in its newspaper press every week. As these reveal, a minority of Indian parents remain anxious for their daughters to marry army, navy and air force officers. But many more Indian families now seek alliances with computer scientists, doctors, civil servants, industrial executives etc. Here is richly human proof that, in India, adopting military uniform is not the main (or even a major) pathway to status, influence and power.

There is also the matter of geography, which is so obvious and consequently so easy to ignore. One reason why Great Britain has been able for most of its history to have a smaller army than other, comparably aggressive European powers, is that it is surrounded by sea. Greater immunity from foreign invasion has assisted regulation of the size and political intrusiveness of its military at home. By the same token, while India is obviously not an island, it is a huge triangular peninsula. It is defended on two of its three sides by the sea. To be sure, its history as an independent nation has been punctuated by wars and bitter border disputes, and by periods of acute anxiety about security. Nonetheless, in terms of frontiers, it possesses a considerable inbuilt advantage over Pakistan which is landlocked on three sides, and almost circled by much larger and more powerful states, Russia looming down on a volatile Afghanistan to its north, China to its east, India to its south. Pakistan's frontier geography makes it liable to perpetual insecurity, not to say paranoia, and this was always likely to have military repercussions.

So, let me summarise the argument thus far. I have been outlining - while also problematising - some of the main factors behind India's success in keeping its military within bounds. I have stressed the considerable degree to which the Raj's military organisation, discipline and ethos proved valuable in this respect and was retained after 1947, while also drawing attention to the more praetorian aspects of British imperium in India, and the extent to which nationalists after 1947 reacted against this. I have underlined the role of modern India's founding fathers, and crucially Nehru, in implanting civilian rule and democracy, while insisting as well on more impersonal and fortuitous influences. To establish how it came about that "a common British colonial legacy led to apparently contrasting patterns of political development - democracy in India and military authoritarianism in Pakistan", it is manifestly not enough to resort to the great man theory of history.[22] Still less is it appropriate to resort, as some have done, to explanations couched in terms of "national character" or religion. We

have to look, among other things, at how the spoils were divided at Partition, at social and economic conditions in these two countries and at their differing geographies and frontier systems.

But what of the contribution of the Indian military itself? The scale of its success and reinvention since 1947 has been remarkable. With the exception of those who defected to the I.N.A., The Indian military did not fight for national independence. In contrast with parts of the Americas, Africa and the Middle East, there was no armed struggle here in which very large numbers of local troops turned against their colonial rulers.. This is arguably one more reason, indeed, why India's armed forces have remained within bounds, while those of other post-colonial nations have not. In India, there could be no convincing, large-scale mystification of the man in uniform as pre-eminent freedom fighter. On the contrary: the fact that the vast majority of India's military had fought alongside the British, not against them, meant that - at independence - the former were initially on the defensive. "Up till now", wrote Gandhi famously, the armed forces "have only been employed in indiscriminate firing on us. Today they must plough the land, dig wells, clean latrines, and do every constructive work that they can, and thus turn the people's hatred of them into love".[23] Yet, within a short space of time, India's military was able to shift from being to some degree suspect - imperial lackeys in the eyes of their critics - to being a prime focus of national pride. How was this *volte face* engineered? And how was it controlled?

One of the crucial figures involved was K M Cariappa, commonly known as the Father of the modern Indian army. Talking to Indian officers now, it is clear that opinions differ about Cariappa's abilities as a military commander; but there can be little dispute about his importance, instincts and adroitness in the wake of Independence. In some respects - like many Indian officers of that generation - he could seem more British than the British themselves. He was born in Coorg in 1899 in a house that his father named "Lime Cottage". He himself rejoiced in the nickname "Kipper", and one of his first acts on being appointed army chief in 1949 was to establish an Indian regiment of Guards on the British model to carry out ceremonial duties. Yet having forged links with nationalist politicians only very belatedly, Cariappa rapidly adjusted to the new order. He recognised that India's military needed to reassure Congress by being at once dazzlingly professional and sturdily apolitical. He understood, too, that the armed forces needed after a fashion to reinvent themselves.[24]

So, at one level, Cariappa persuaded Nehru not to readmit to the armed services all the officers and men who had defected to the I.N.A. , which was what many nationalists wanted. Politics, even nationalist politics, could not be allowed to compromise military discipline. As army chief, Cariappa also regularly addressed and circularised the army on the paramount importance of remaining aloof from any kind of partisanship. "Understand politics, but do not get involved in its processes", he told his officers in 1949. " I want to make it clear", he informed the ranks, "that you are not politicians... You are Indians first and Indians last".[25] At another level, and as is suggested by this latter speech, Cariappa and his circle worked at Indianising the army in fact and in the politicians' and public's estimation. Whereas high ranking British officers remained in important positions in Pakistan's armed forces way into the 1950s, the majority of Britons seeking to hang on in the Indian army were shunted out within a year of Independence. "The Indian army in independent India", Cariappa declared in his first speech to the press as Army Chief in 1949: "was a people's army and the gulf that previously existed between the army and the people was now a thing of the past".[26]

Since post-1947 Indian armed forces retained so many aspects of former British military organisation, one might have expected that this would have obstructed their acceptance as a national, people's army. Yet over time this proved not to be the case. As represented and re-imagined by Cariappa and his kind, the Raj became a minor interlude in an ages-old story of Indian armed valour that had now re-emerged from the shadow of empire to take its proper place in the light. One can see this adroit process of re-invention already at work in the proceedings of the Armed Forces Nationalization

Committee, set up by Congress late in 1945, and in which Cariappa played a leading part. "The Indian Army is not a new force", declared the committee's chairman in February 1947: "It has a history and high traditions". While the committee's draft report began by stating that: "The history of India is rich in martial tradition. The military achievements of her armies from the earliest times up to the present day are second to none in the world".[27]

It is in the light of this skilful work of nationalist re-imagining that some aspects of Indian military visual culture may be understood even now. Enter the officers' mess of one of the more traditional Indian regiments, and you are still likely to see displayed on its walls paintings by British military artists of Indian troops fighting for Queen Victoria's empire. Visit a prime New Delhi hotel, and you may well be struck by the number of antique prints on show of fearsome Indian soldiers in the ornate uniforms of the Raj. Such displays do not connote simple Anglophilia or imperial nostalgia. To an extraordinary degree, these onetime imperial images have been reclaimed and nationalised, converted into wholesome, cheering representations of an eternal, distinctively Indian valour.

As we have seen, there are all kinds of reasons why the Indian military's success is reinventing and nationalising itself in the wake of independence has not been accompanied by its evolving as well an intrusive political role, but there is one more factor in this regard which needs mentioning. Virtually all nations define themselves by reference to a real or imagined other and, while the roots of its nationalism are many, India is no exception in this respect. Its most prominent "other" since 1947 - the polity against which it has chosen most to define itself - has of course been Pakistan. This has surely had an impact on the self-image of India's warriors. The fact that Pakistan's armed forces have both intervened in its politics, and been defeated in successive wars with India's armed forces, has, I suspect, helped confirm the latter in the view that an apolitical military is also the best military. Proclaiming the apolitical nature of their armed forces functions for Indians, among many other things, as a way of proclaiming difference from Pakistan; it also functions as a way of asserting superiority.

We come back then, to issues of complacency. I have sought to convey how remarkable is India's relationship with its armed forces, and why this has happened as it has. But celebration of what has been achieved in this regard - while legitimate - is insufficient. "The armed forces of India have done the nation proud", declared a writer in a leading Indian military publication in 2000: "one need not look far to appreciate what a priceless asset they are, admired the world over for their commitment to professional values and to the Constitution of India".[28] Well, yes. But, India's military - like the military in other states - needs thinking about more searchingly and more broadly than this. So let me conclude by touching on some of the reasons why this is desirable.

As far as scholarly analysis is concerned, it is important to get away from the notion that, because military coups have not occurred in independent India and seem unlikely in the future, therefore its armed forces are to be viewed as unambiguously apolitical. This kind of bogus dichotomy (military takeovers on the one hand, professional because thoroughly apolitical armed forces on the other) has hobbled several, otherwise excellent studies of civil-military relations in India. What is needed is a more nuanced and - if it ever becomes possible - archivally-based analysis of the relations and tensions over time between India's post-1947 governments and its military. Such largely anecdotal sources as are available make clear that there have been periods when this relationship has been characterized by suspicion and anxiety. S L Menezes records, for instance, that at the time of Nehru's funeral in 1964, General J N Chaudhuri:

> made elaborate arrangements for security, by bringing troops into Delhi, recalling the confusion that prevailed at Mahatma Gandhi's funeral, when Mountbatten had feared for Nehru's life.

> Chaudhuri was later to recount that his telephone had then been tapped as the fear had circulated that a military takeover was imminent.[29]

Then there is Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw's notorious claim in his memoirs that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi asked him point-blank during the Declaration of Emergency in the mid-1970s whether or not he was plotting a military coup. This has been dismissed as a "gross and inherently implausible" story, but a onetime senior member of India's Foreign Service assured me in a private interview that it contained some substance. According to him Manekshaw's reply to Mrs Gandhi's question was along the lines of: "You are too pretty to coup against".[30] True or no, it would be nice if we could progress beyond anecdotes such as these to a less personalized and better-documented evaluation of the changing tenor of civil-military relations during India's first half-century as an independent nation.

India's rulers, though, have far more immediate and pressing reasons to think closely and rigorously about its armed forces. In all modern states, civilian politicians are at risk of succumbing to two very different though connected mistakes about the military. They can become over-dazzled by the military's obvious glamour, brute power, and stirring and apparently simple virtues. Conversely, they can take their country's armed forces too much for granted, and fail to keep themselves sufficiently informed about their morale, internal difficulties, and limitations. As was demonstrated in "Operation Blue Star" in 1984, Indian politicians have sometimes been guilty of the second of these errors. In retrospect, those in charge during this crisis did not sufficiently consider that Bhindranwale and his dissidents were assisted by some former Indian army officers, and therefore likely to put up more than usually stiff resistance. Nor do the politicians seem sufficiently to have considered that Indian troops take an oath according to their particular religion as well as a political oath. Consequently, ordering the army into the Golden Temple complex, the central Sikh shrine in Amritsar, was always likely to impose acute strains on the loyalties of the Sikh officers and men involved. For these errors and omissions, Mrs Gandhi paid with her life.

More generally, and as was made abundantly clear to me, some senior Indian officers, and some civilian experts feel strongly that the bureaucratic distance between the military and the politicians created after 1947 to keep the former in its place can still obstruct and blunt proper communication and planning in defence matters. It will be interesting to see what if any long-term changes are implemented in this connection in the wake of the Kargil affair in 1999.

But what of the Indian people at large? Most people in India, as elsewhere, know and care little about the complexities of defence and military organisation. Yet anyone who is concerned about India's democracy, internal stability, and role in the world should give thought to its military, not least because India is now a nuclear power. This does not mean speculating in alarmist fashion about the potential here for an armed coup, but rather acknowledging that there are some real causes for concern. The rise of Hindu nationalism and the BJP over the past few decades has been accompanied by attempts to infiltrate and propagandise among the ranks of the armed forces. Such activities run counter to the Indian military's invaluable apolitical reputation and to its success in bridging all religious groupings, and are - as one former minister put it to me - a "disruptive trend which one will have to monitor".[31] Troubling, too, is the growing resort to the armed forces to suppress internal and communal violence. Since the 1970s, the Indian military has been used to maintain internal order far more frequently than it was under the British Raj, and there has also been a rise in para-military organizations. But by far the biggest challenge is what is happening to India's political system in general. Highly resilient and still hugely popular, Indian democracy is nonetheless threatened by growing corruption, by the decline of the Congress party, by religious sectarianism and communal violence, and by the Indian parliament's apparent incapacity to bridge these internal divides.[32] In this

volatile, troubled context, it is more than usually vital that serious thought and effort be devoted to keeping India's military sound and at a distance from political divisions and discontents.

And what, finally, about the rest of us? All modern militaries - however they behave and whatever they profess - are quintessentially political institutions in that they embody their respective states' determination to monopolise violence. Yet in democracies civilians generally devote very little critical thought and enquiry to the armed forces in their midst. This is unwise and short-sighted. Armed forces which are no longer recruited by conscription can become unduly separated from the mainstream of society. And, as recent events demonstrate, what modern armed forces can now do against even fairly large and sophisticated societies can be rapid and terrifying indeed. Acknowledging this is not in any way an invitation to fantasising about military coups, which have declined in frequency in most parts of the world during the past two decades. It is a plea rather for wider, more informed discussion and awareness of a section of the state that in peacetime we often taken for granted or ignore. A political scientist has recently observed that: "The relationship of the soldier to the state in Asia is not a settled issue".[33] I would agree with this remark, but I would also expand it. The relationship of the soldier to the state in every continent is not a settled issue. We all need to think much harder about it than we do.

[1] This lecture was delivered at the London School of Economics on 24 April 2003, and I have retained much of the original style and text. Among the many individuals and institutions who assisted me in researching this topic, I thank in particular the Governors of the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Trust, the British High Commission and especially Brigadier Ian Rees who organized my research and interviewing schedule in New Delhi, the members of the British Council there, and the audiences who commented on early versions of my ideas at JNU, the Delhi Policy Group at Habitat Centre, and the United Service Institute.

[2] Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (New Jersey, 1977), p.xi. It is worth noting that the frequency of coups in most regions of the world has declined over the past two decades.

[3] Sunil Khilnani, The Idea of India (London, 1997), p.229

[4] Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1995) p.258

[5] One of the consequences of such rigid archival controls is that it is far easier to ascertain what the British wanted to happen in regard to the armed forces in the Indian sub-continent on the eve of Independence, than it is to investigate the attitudes of the leading Indian civil and military actors on this issue. But see the papers of the Armed Forces Nationalization Committee, organised in Delhi in 1946, and chaired by Sir N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar. Little used by scholars, these include reports to the committee by a wide range of Indian as well as British expert witnesses: *National Army Museum Library*, London MSS. 8204-797-1,2, and 6. The papers of General Sir F R R Bucher in the same Library are also a valuable guide to debates on the Indian armed forces immediately before and after Independence.

[6] Cf. the argument of K Kuldip Singh, a former Brigadier who served in the Indian army for 34 years: "The soldier has come to be treated as a sacred cow, resulting in stuporous belief in the society that all must be well in the military": *Overcoming Crisis in Leadership* (New Delhi, 1998)

[7] Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford, 1997) p.5

[8] I stress relatively uncontroversial. I was frequently made aware, while working on this lecture, how national background, as well as age, occupation, religion, and politics, inflected reactions to the questions I was addressing. Thus a senior Indian diplomat in London rebuked me for giving insufficient attention to the "innate" democratic temper of his countrymen. A Pakistani military official complained that any inquiry into why India had kept its army within bounds after 1947 was bound by its very nature to reflect badly - and unfairly - on his own country. While a British diplomatic and imperial historian assured me that I had given insufficient credit to the military heritage of the Raj. It is possible that all three of these objections contain some substance.

[9] Private interview March 2003

[10] David Omissi, The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940 (London, 1994), *passim*

[11] *Ibid*. p. 103

[12] This point was made to me by one of few still serving Indian officers I was allowed to interview while in India. See also T. Jacob, *Cantonments in India: Evolution and Growth* (New Delhi, 1994)

[13] For these continuities, see Alan J Guy and Peter B Boyden, assisted by Marion Harding (eds) *Soldiers of the Raj: The Indian Army 1600 - 1947* (London 1997); and Apuba Kundhu, *Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus* (London 1998), especially pp. 783-6, 191

[14] John Gaylor, *Sons of John Company: The Indian and Pakistan Armies* 1903-91 (Speldhurst, 1992, p28

[15] Quoted in S L Menezes, *Fidelity and Honour: The Indian Army from the Seventeenth to the Twenty-First Century* (New Delhi, 1999), p. 235. I am most grateful for all the assistance and kindness General Menezes bestowed upon me during the writing of this lecture.

[16] A useful account is given in K C Praval, *Indian Army after the Independence* (New Delhi, 1993 edn.).

[17] Quoted in C B Khanduri, *Field Marshal K M Cariappa: His Life and Times* (New Delhi, 1995), p.260

[18] The classic military history of this episode is D K Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis,1962* (London, 1991).

[19] Jinnah is quoted in Veena Kukreja, *Civil-Military Relations in South Asia: Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India* (New Delhi, 1991), p. 56; see *ibid*, p. 185 for S K Patil's tribute to Nehru

[20] Indivar Kamtekar, "The End of the Colonial State in India", Cambridge University Ph.D. dissertation 1988, p.191

[21] Amos Perlmuter and Valerie Plave Bennett, *The Political Influence of the Military: A Comparative Reade*r (New Haven, 1980), p.205

[22] Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism*, preface

[23] Quoted in Menezes, *Fidelity and Honour*, p.444

[24] See Khanduri, *Cariappa,, passim.* There is room for a less reverential and more detached assessment of Cariappa's career. Apurba Kundhu, for instance, notes that he became increasingly disenchanted in old age, dabbled in politics (failing to get elected for congress), and favoured "civil administration being made subordinate to the Army": *Militarism in India*, p.109

[25] Khanduri, *Cariappa*, pp. 225, 234

[26] Report of his first speech to the press as Commander in Chief: *Fauji Akhbar*, 5 February 1949

[27] *National Army Museum Library, London*, MSS. 8204-797-2 (introduction), and 8204-797--6 (record of business on 4 February 1947)

[28] A G Noornai, "The Army's Mind, *Frontline*, 7 January 2000.
[29] Menezes, *Fidelity and Honour,* pp. 488.9
[30] Private interview in New Delhi, March 2003; Noornai, *Frontline*, 7 January 2000
[31] Private interview in New Delhi, March 2003
[32] For an interesting and pessimistic recent survey, see Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri, "India's pseudo-democracy", *Asian Media* web-site, 11 January 2003
[33] Muthiah Alagappa, *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford, CA, 2001), p.2