

Armed forces and Politics

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Introduction:

The Indian Armed Forces are the military forces of the Republic of India. It consists of three professional uniformed services: the Indian Army, Indian Navy, and Indian Air Force. Additionally, the Indian Armed Forces are supported by the Indian Coast Guard and paramilitary organisations. The President of India is the Supreme Commander of the Indian Armed Forces. The Indian Armed Forces are under the management of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) of the Government of India. It is the world's second-largest military force with strength of over 1.4 million active personnel. It is important to note that the Central Armed Police Forces, which are referred to as 'Paramilitary Forces' based on colonial perspective, are not armed forces.

Politics in arena of armed forces

The use of the armed forces as a political tool is just one side of the coin. Even more dangerous is the fact that it sends the signal to the top

brass that there is nothing wrong in intermixing politics with the military.

It is in India's national interest that our armed forces — as an institution — be non-partisan, professional, and both keep out and be kept out of electoral politics.

This is the formula that has allowed liberal democracies to protect individual rights, secure prosperity and wield formidable military power without being consumed by it. It's important that this relationship should protect and preserve.

When eight former service chiefs and scores of retired senior officers thought it necessary to write to the President of India, expressing their grave concern over the politicisation of the armed forces, we ought to take it seriously.

Indian armed forces have always been apolitical and secular. Using military achievements for electoral gains is dangerous. In my opinion, the personnel of armed forces should not bias themselves with any political ideologies or political parties. Political parties invest in cultivating the personnel of the armed forces to exploit public sentiment as the actions; conduct and ownership of the armed forces are part of the political discourse.

Sometimes crucial appointments affected with political environment. Professional judgment gets compromised leading to advice and actions of the armed forces becoming politically partisan.

In weaker democracies, a politicized army becomes a stakeholder for political power and policy and the political control over the armed forces and in its most extreme form, the military usurps political power.

Of late, Indian Military is at Centre stage of national politics for more reasons than one. On one hand the military is being lauded and deified for professionally securing India against external and internal threats, and on the other hand there is simmering discontent in the military and its large veteran's community with respect to status, pay, pensions and allowances. Both aspects are being exploited by the political parties for political purposes.

There should be a proper balance between these two pillars of any country as politics and armed forces both are responsible for internal and external security of a nation.

It is very hard to find a genuine inclusive democratic process de-linked from caste and religion driven identity politics and this identity based politics sometimes dangerous when it influences the forces of a nation. Armed forces have always functioned through impartial rational action determined by military necessity within the framework of the constitution but relentless communalisation of politics and ideology driven governance is causing a serious damage to our society and security.

The armed forces have been identified in totality with different brands of nationalism advocated by our elected representatives and are clearly at the risk of being affected by the growing mismatch between the ideals they adhere to and the practice they witness. Politicisation of the armed forces is a self-defeating exercise in a democracy and political parties, who attempt it, do so at their own peril.

The damage to a commander's credibility will have its own impact on his standing and weaken his position which the bureaucracy will take

advantage of to the detriment of the institution. So, the Chiefs have an onerous task ahead. They have to reinforce the apolitical ethos of the armed forces and ensure that it adheres to the values enshrined in the constitution. The time tested rules and regulations must be strictly enforced and exemplary disciplinary action taken where necessary.

There was a time; Indian armed forces personnel followed one cardinal principle: that they would not discuss politics or women. That seems to have changed now. Politics now appears to be the most favored topic of discussion among armed forces personnel – serving and retired.

There are so many incidents which capture our sights towards the politics involvement in armed forces, which can be a serious issue in coming times. From the source of internet I have found some these sorts of incidences; as in 2014 the appointment of the next chief of the Army staff barely two days before the end of the present government's tenure raises questions about its motives in rushing through the announcement. Were they nervous that they were desperate to have their own man in place to mask the wrongdoings?, or Several retired senior Army officers can be seen participating in TV discussions these days and some of armed personnel enter in politics after retirement but question is it is good or bad as he belongs from a field which should be unbiased from politics and their only aim is to protect internal and external security rather than favouring some political ideology?

Another one is ,Lt Gen (retd) D S Hooda, the main architect of the 2016 surgical strikes on terror launch pads in PoK, said it is "worrisome" that the military is increasingly being drawn into the political discourse and used to win political argument. With him ,The Indian Army's former Northern Command chief also said the talk around politicisation of the military "is sort of exaggerated".

I think, if all political parties can just leave the military out of the political discourse, that would be the best. Forces are not supposed to be an instrument of hands of some political puppets, people have also tasted success using name of the military for electoral victory,"

Politicisation of the armed forces is when the government in power can make the armed forces do its bidding, not in the national interest but for personal interest.

The political class needs to realise that it is not easy to bargain with armed forces. India's politicians are most responsible for damaging the political neutrality of the armed forces.

The bureaucracy and the armed forces are the iron framework of the nation. They are the ones who ensure continuity of government policies by remaining neutral and not letting their own political ideologies interfere with their work. They must remain neutral.

In my opinion, the politicisation of defence forces personnel is more dangerous than that of bureaucrats. It is time the leaders of the armed forces take urgent steps to prevent troops from losing their political neutrality. Politicians too must tread with caution and not allow this important institution to fall into an abyss.

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