

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EVOLUTION OF INDIA'S MILITARY POSITION

4.1 In assessing the implications for the regional strategic outlook of India's enhanced defence capability, the Committee looked at the potential threat posed by India to the strategic balance in South and South East Asia. The Committee pursued the time-honoured formula that potential threat has two dimensions: intent and capability. This chapter surveys those factors which are important in understanding India's intent in its present defence build-up. The reasons behind the rapid growth of India's navy are given special attention. The following chapter reviews Indian military capabilities.

4.2 India's defence establishment has been profoundly influenced by the country's turbulent experience of international affairs since independence. This experience has been marked on the one hand by war and instability in the South Asian region, and on the other hand by India's leading role in representing the Third World in the international arena.

4.3 India's post-war experience of international affairs has been much more complex — and threatening — than Australia's. As an officer of the Department of Defence observed:

It is rather trite to say — but I think it needs to be said — that the world looks very different from New Delhi, than it does from Canberra or Washington or London.¹

4.4 Yet India's current policies cannot be explained entirely as a product of past pressures; or even of continuing difficulties with its neighbours or with some of its own communities. During the last decade, India has undergone major internal changes. Its economy has expanded rapidly and this process has consolidated India's position as the region's major power and as one of the world's second ranking powers. The educated classes in India, and many among the less educated people, now have new and more proud expectations of their country's international standing.

4.5 Thus, to understand India's current military policies, it is necessary to look not only at its threat perceptions, which still have the major impact on its defence planning, but also at the development within the country of views on what India's regional and world role should be.

Conflict in South Asia and India's Threat Perceptions

4.6 The two most important external threats that India has been concerned with in the modern period are Pakistan and China, and their allies or friends. India has had four wars since 1947 and serious border clashes on several other

¹ *Evidence*, p.231

occasions. War almost broke out between India and Pakistan in January 1987 and between India and China as recently as September 1987. As the Department of Defence put it:

To the Indian politician or defence planner, the abiding geographic reality of India is that it has extensive land borders over which threats to India have traditionally come, on and off, for close to 5,000 years. Abutting those borders are two countries of large existing or potential military power which have close relations with each other, and neither of which can be seen to be aligned with India and its interests. India has fought four wars: three against Pakistan and one against China... Defence planners tend to be driven by worst case scenarios, and that is particularly so in India where previous experience suggests that these worst case scenarios are not necessarily unreal.²

4.7 India's security perceptions have also been shaped from the outset by internal considerations: from the initial potential threat posed by a large Muslim community at times when India was at war with Pakistan; to Chinese backed insurgency in the north-east in the 1960s; and to pressures created by the Tamil population of southern India in connection with the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka. There are others. As the Department of Defence noted:

Problems affecting internal security and unity, most notably in Punjab, are a continuing preoccupation.³

Pakistan: the First Threat — India's Response

4.8 The partition of British India into Pakistan (East and West) and India was accompanied by great communal violence: millions of Muslims crossed into Pakistan and millions of Hindus moved into India. At the same time, millions of Moslems remained in India and a substantial Hindu population remained in Pakistan. Thus, the Hindu-Moslem communal conflict of British India was transformed into an international conflict and was perpetuated by continuing communal problems in the two separate countries. This situation was aggravated and, in a sense permanently institutionalised, as a result of the situation that prevailed in the border province of Jammu and Kashmir at the time of independence.

4.9 This province contained a large Muslim majority but was ruled as an independent Princely State by a Hindu Maharajah. His hesitation in choosing whether to join India or Pakistan resulted in an incursion by Muslim tribesmen from Pakistan, a local uprising, the flight of the Maharajah into India, and the formal accession of his territories into India. The incursion was met with Indian armed resistance and war broke out in 1948. A UN sponsored ceasefire was eventually agreed to but it resulted in a divided Kashmir.

4.10 This division of Kashmir provided the opportunity for yet another war in 1965. This war did not resolve the matter either.

² *ibid.*, pp.231-2

³ *ibid.*, p.217

4.11 The 1965 Indo-Pakistani War marked an important turning point in Indian naval development. Although the war had been fought specifically over control of Kashmir and was therefore primarily a land-based war, naval clashes took place. In these clashes, the Pakistani forces proved themselves able to raid Indian ports on both the east and west coast with virtual impunity.

4.12 Until 1965, India's motley fleet of antiquated ships had essentially concerned itself with maintaining harbour security and patrolling waters used by Indian fishing and merchant ships. Indian defence planners had assumed that this patrolling activity, projecting India's navy as a 'denial force', would deter any aggressive Pakistani naval activity.

4.13 However, the short war with Pakistan proved the Indian Government's confidence in their 'denial force' to be misplaced. The Indian emphasis on peace-time patrolling as a method of protection had left the Indian naval force inadequately equipped and trained to intercept the Pakistani raiders. Indian shortcomings were aggravated by the fact that the Navy's carrier, *INS Vikrant*, was out of action undergoing a refit.

4.14 Pakistan's naval attacks during this war forced a change of thinking in India. In 1965, India had 1 carrier, 2 cruisers, 3 destroyers, 8 frigates, 6 small escort vessels and no submarines.⁴ There was no longer any room to believe that a war over disputed land territory would be confined to land. Prior to 1965, India's formally documented plans for a major naval expansion had been largely ignored by the Government because of other perceived priorities. Renewed interest in these plans was the direct result of Pakistan's naval successes in 1965.

4.15 The Indian Government called for an increased emphasis on the Navy as well as a more effective naval defence strategy. The Indian Navy's new approach was to aim for a force that was equipped and trained either to defeat an enemy navy or, at least, to bottle it up in its home waters. India would no longer rely on the psychological impact of extensive naval patrolling.

4.16 In mid-1966, it was announced that a rapid naval expansion programme would take place. This would include moves to establish a two fleet navy, an Eastern and a Western fleet. Naval bases at Bombay and Cochin were expanded. New bases were established at Marmagar (Goa) and Vishakhapatnam. New facilities were planned for Port Blair in the Andaman Islands. The Naval Air Arm established airfields in Goa and at Wellington Island off Cochin.

4.17 The Naval Air Arm also obtained more anti-submarine warfare helicopters. These were stationed on the carrier *INS Vikrant*.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.101

4.18 In August 1966, a delegation visited the Soviet Union to negotiate the purchase of naval vessels. These included eight OSA class missile boats, four submarines, eight patrol craft and some landing ships. The Soviet Union provided easy terms of purchase.

4.19 Later in 1966, the Government formally announced its plans to establish an indigenous warship construction capacity. India would, from then on, build up its navy with a combination of vessels purchased abroad and built at home.

4.20 The 1971 Indo-Pakistani War was quite different in character from either the 1948 or 1965 wars. The two earlier wars were fought over control of Kashmir. The 1971 war was fought over the question of independence for Bangladesh — what was then East Pakistan. The prospect of independence for Bangladesh also offered the possibility of a major change in the strategic balance in South Asia in India's favour. Indian forces intervened in Bangladesh and, in a very short war defeated the West Pakistani forces based in the East, thereby delivering independence to Bangladesh.

4.21 The Indian navy played an important role in the 1971 war. The forces in the east, structured around the *INS Vikrant*, bottled up Pakistani shipping in the Bay of Bengal off the coast of East Pakistan. This prevented Pakistan from either re-supplying or evacuating its forces in the East. The *INS Vikrant* launched many strike missions in the Bay of Bengal. The Western Command, with its OSA class missile boats as spearhead, launched a highly successful strike against Karachi harbour, where the Pakistani fleet was headquartered.

4.22 The value of effectively denying an enemy the ability to deploy its naval forces became an entrenched part of Indian naval consciousness as a result of the 1971 war.

Great Power Involvement in Indo-Pakistani Conflict

4.23 By the time the 1971 war occurred, the India-Pakistan confrontation had become internationalised — the superpowers began to be more directly involved. This process of internationalisation had its origins in the different foreign policy stances adopted by the new Governments of India and Pakistan at the time of their independence, and in relatively poor management by the United States of its early relationship with India.

4.24 India, under Prime Minister Nehru, became an outspoken leader of the Non-Aligned Movement and severe critic of what it saw as Western imperialism in Asia and Africa. Pakistan, under successive governments, developed a much stronger pro-Western orientation. Pakistan signed a Mutual Assistance Agreement with the United States in 1954 and joined the two United States sponsored military alliance groups — the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO). During the 1950s, the US supplied Pakistan with substantial military and economic assistance. The military aid to Pakistan was justified on the grounds that it was needed for Pakistan to participate in the Western Alliance's common defence against potentially hostile communist neighbours to the north. However the majority of

military equipment delivered by the United States was stationed on the border with India and nearly 90 percent of Pakistani forces continued to be deployed against Indian positions.

4.25 The 1959 security agreement between the US and Pakistan committed the United States to support Pakistan by measures 'as may mutually be agreed upon' if Pakistan was subjected to armed aggression. Pakistan has always tended to a broad interpretation of this treaty, arguing that it covered Indian aggression against Pakistan and not just communist aggression.

4.26 Another important naval event in connection with the 1971 war also had a significant effect on Indian naval development. In the later phase of the 1971 war, the United States despatched to the Bay of Bengal a carrier battle group, including the nuclear armed *USS Enterprise*. These United States forces were attempting to demonstrate some United States support for Pakistan but they arrived after the surrender of the Pakistani forces and their role was never fully tested.

4.27 In India, however, this United States show of force was naturally viewed as a threat and, indeed, a possible nuclear threat. Dr Michael McKinley quoted in his submission the following assessment by an American scholar, Stephen P. Cohen, of that incident:

The sailing [into the Bay of Bengal] of the *USS Enterprise* was the ultimate in symbolic insult, and drove India's fear of regional penetration to new heights just at the moment of its greatest political and military triumph... Years after it occurred, the *Enterprise* episode is invariably raised in discussions with Indian strategists, journalists and members of the foreign policy community. It had a major impact on military thinking and contributed directly to the present expansion programme of the Indian Navy. Above all, it is remembered as a nuclear as well as a military threat.⁵

4.28 Dr Robert Bruce of the Centre for Indian Ocean Regional Studies in Perth made a similar point during his evidence:

The point about the American ship coming to the Bay of Bengal is important... The Americans did not want to have the Indian navy built up. What they did perhaps helped to provoke it, which over the long term was not what they wanted. On the other hand, perhaps the Indians saw exactly the impact that that had. The superpower, which was unopposed, was able to go that close and attempt to achieve political ends. In other words, it was telling India, 'Do not go too far in terms of the dismemberment of Pakistan. Do not attack Pakistan'. The Indians may have seen what it was like to be at the weak end and they recognised that military strength has certain benefits.⁶

⁵ *ibid.*, p.94

⁶ *ibid.*, pp.58-59

4.29 The psychological impact on India of this great power intervention should not be underestimated. The United States action gave India a strong sense of impotence and a dent in its pride.

4.30 Ways and means of discouraging such future interventions by any outside major power have figured prominently in Indian strategy since then. The foundation of the strategy to prevent a repetition of such coercive naval diplomacy has been the projected establishment of well-armed carrier battle groups that can operate with the support of ground-based aviation as well as carrier-based aircraft.

4.31 The 1971 deployment of the *USS Enterprise* carrier battle group was, however, the only significant example of US forces actually being deployed in assistance to Pakistan. In fact, United States failure to come decisively to Pakistan's defence when the country was dismembered with Indian military assistance resulted in a decision by Pakistan to develop much closer relations with China, a country also seriously at odds with India.

4.32 Although India buys major amounts of military equipment from the Soviet Union and signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR in 1971, India prefers not to rely on its relationship with the USSR as the major deterrent against Pakistan or the United States. India has always aimed at building up the greatest degree of self-sufficiency in its defence forces. This is even reflected in the kind of agreements it has negotiated with the Soviet Union which provide for manufacturing within India of major equipment items, including ships and planes. India has not offered the USSR regular basing facilities for the Soviet navy and in this respect clearly intends to set itself at one step's remove from military alliance with the USSR.

4.33 In fact, this policy of distance from the USSR tends to confirm the proposition that India's response to the naval involvement of the superpowers in the India-Pakistan conflict and the Indian Ocean has been as much political as it has military. Indian defence planning does not consider that it is possible for India to defeat a full superpower battle group, such as those possessed by the United States. Nor does India particularly want to engage in combat with one. The Indian calculation has been to raise political costs to the United States of becoming involved in a naval battle with India. This calculation depends on India's importance as a leader of the non-aligned movement and on its close relationship with the USSR. India does not regard its Treaty with the USSR as a military alliance guaranteeing Soviet intervention in the event of a major conflict. Nevertheless, the Treaty was signed only weeks before the Indian intervention in East Pakistan in 1971, implying that the Indian Government saw some value in the Treaty as a complicating factor in Pakistani and United States calculations.

4.34 The long term objective of India's naval strategy was described in 1979 by a former Indian Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral A K Chatterji, as follows:

...a force equal in size and competence to the naval forces of any one of the superpowers now formally operating in the area.⁷

4.35 The Australian Department of Defence commented on this aspect of India's naval power in the following way:

An enhanced maritime capacity would also lessen the likelihood that India itself could be subjected to 'coercive naval diplomacy', which India believes occurred with the deployment of a US carrier battle group into the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War.⁸

4.36 The concern that naval defence against major powers not be neglected is reflected very clearly in the following statement of then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi quoted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in its submission:

Confronted with the growing presence of outside naval forces in the Indian Ocean, we are left with no alternative but to strengthen our naval defences and resist any attempt to undermine our independence or integrity from the direction of the sea. We are also determined to exercise our legitimate rights in our exclusive economic zone.⁹

4.37 The course of the development of India-Pakistan relations, the specific character of the three wars, and the internationalisation of the conflict have all contributed to the momentum towards a major defence force, including major naval forces.

Pakistan: A Threat in the Future?

4.38 India's perceptions of threat from Pakistan still underlie current Indian defence planning despite recent efforts to improve relations between the two countries.

4.39 The territory in Kashmir remains in dispute and the border is a potential flashpoint. Outbreaks of artillery exchanges in the Siachen glacier area have become routine. The Kashmir problem continues to define threat perceptions that exist today in India. United Nations observers remain in place on the border. While this problem between Pakistan and India remains, another war between the two countries over control of Kashmir cannot be ruled out. Both India and Pakistan deploy significant portions of their Armed Forces on or near their mutual border.

4.40 The Committee does not therefore accept the view that any reopening of hostilities is unlikely simply because the Indian Armed Forces are far more powerful than those of Pakistan.

⁷ Quoted in P. Lewis Young, 'India's Nuclear Submarine Acquisition', *Asian Defence Journal*, 11/1988, p.14

⁸ *Evidence*, p.223

⁹ *ibid.*, p.805

4.41 The Committee also rejects the view that the threat of conflict with Pakistan does not account for the expansion of India's navy.¹⁰ Information available to the Committee and outlined above demonstrates a clear naval dimension to the India-Pakistan conflict. Moreover, the tension between India and Pakistan has attracted the involvement of the superpowers, and this involvement brings with it a much wider naval dimension.

4.42 The accession to power of Rajiv Gandhi in India and, more recently, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan saw new initiatives aimed at trying to improve relations. A number of face-to-face bilateral meetings were held. Gandhi made a point of keeping Bhutto informed on the results of his trips overseas, in particular his trip to the People's Republic of China. Agreements were signed on increasing trade and making travel between the two countries easier. They also signed an agreement to the effect that neither country will attack the other's nuclear facilities.

4.43 At the same time, disagreements and suspicion continue. Differences emerged at the Summit Meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in late 1988, especially on the issue of arms control. Bhutto has urged bilateral arms control talks between India and Pakistan. However, India does not see the security problem in the region as stemming from the India-Pakistan relationship by itself, but from the presence of extra-regional powers in the Indian Ocean region and from the presence of nuclear missiles in the People's Republic of China. It therefore desires arms control talks to take place on a much wider basis.

4.44 More serious disagreements have arisen over Indian accusations about Pakistani involvement in the Sikh revolt in the Punjab, over concern with some statements from within Pakistan about its nuclear weapons programme, and over the continuing deployment by Pakistan to the Indian border of sophisticated military equipment supplied by the United States ostensibly in response to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

4.45 There is obviously a desire on the part of the two Governments to reduce tensions and improve the relationship. However there is little evidence that the underlying foundations of this long rivalry (particularly domestic political imperatives in both countries) have receded to the extent that either country will change the assumptions upon which they base their defence planning. Indian defence planners will continue to plan for the contingency of a surprise Pakistani attack on Kashmir, especially in the case of problems on other fronts. India will continue to assume that any resurgence of conflict with Pakistan will involve naval forces and that such a conflict will have the potential to involve the United States Navy. India will continue to pursue the objective of a large, blue water naval force.

4.46 The resultant build-up of Indian defence capabilities will heighten fears in Pakistan which will, in turn, continue to seek further United States military assistance. The arms race dynamic shows few signs of faltering.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.222

4.47 The Indian Armed Forces are not all located adjacent to the Pakistani border. The Indian defence establishment sees the need to consider the possibility of conflict elsewhere at the same time as having to defend its claims in Kashmir. There is a reasonable prospect that Pakistan, if it were to consider a military action in Kashmir, would wait until India became involved on other fronts, such as with China, in Sri Lanka, or with major ethnic or communal disruptions inside India itself.

4.48 This question of nuclear proliferation in South Asia is dealt with in the following chapter. However, it should be noted here that another consequence of the rivalry and arms race between India and Pakistan is the emergence of a nuclear aspect. Both India and Pakistan are considered nuclear weapons threshold states. They have the capability to move quickly to build nuclear weapons. India and Pakistan have recently tested ballistic missiles which could eventually be used as delivery systems for nuclear weapons. These developments confirm the persistence of the arms race between India and Pakistan.

4.49 A significant development in India's situation towards Pakistan — and in India's foreign relations generally — has been the marked warming in relations between India and the United States. During his term in office, President Reagan described India as making a 'valuable contribution to regional stability'.¹¹ As another United States official put it:

It doesn't make sense for the U.S. not to have a congenial relationship with the largest democracy and the dominant military power in the sub-continent — and with a country that will clearly take its place on the world stage in the 21st century.¹²

4.50 High level visits in both directions have become more frequent, with Rajiv Gandhi visiting the United States in 1987 and the Indian Defence Minister, K.C. Pant, visiting in 1989.

4.51 The United States has begun to transfer high technology to India, including some military technology (the United States has sold India a super computer previously denied to it, and has also offered to participate in an Indian project for development of a light combat aircraft). The stated aim of such a policy is to help India become self-sufficient in defence technology and less dependent on the USSR.¹³ As the relationship between India and the United States improves, India will feel much more confident of its security position in respect of Pakistan and superpower interventions in general.

India and China

4.52 The most substantial element in Indian threat perceptions and military planning since 1947 has been the prospect of war with Pakistan. However, the transformation of the India-China relationship from one of friendship in the 1950s

¹¹ Ross H. Munro, 'Superpower Rising', *Time*, 3 April 1989, p.15

¹² *ibid.*, p.15

¹³ *ibid.*, p.20

into one of armed conflict in the 1962 India-China border war added a significant new dimension. Senior Indian military officers regarded the outcome of the 1962 conflict as a humiliation for India's armed forces. There is a strong sentiment in Indian military circles that one day India will have to 'sort China out'. The acquisition by China of a nuclear weapons capability in the mid-1960s and the general belligerence of China's foreign policy during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1971) added a new edge to India's already stretched military position. The support by China of communist insurgent movements in Asia, including in India's north east, was another cause of grave concern.

4.53 Suspicion is still a dominant feature of India's relationship with China. The invasion of Vietnam by China in 1979 was confirmation for India that it needed to maintain its guard against a similar border conflict with China. India also views with concern China's ambitious naval plans, especially the acquisition of nuclear powered, nuclear armed submarines.

4.54 Negotiations between India and China on improving mutual relations began in 1981, with the establishment of several working groups (including one on the border dispute). The discussions in the working group on the border dispute rekindled the suspicion on each side that the other had not abandoned its previous hard-line position. By 1987, both China and India had reinforced military units along their common border in the disputed areas to the point where a resumption of hostilities seemed imminent.

4.55 The situation was eventually defused but the fact that both sides were actively preparing for a possible resumption fighting as recently as three years ago demonstrates that there is a long way to go before India and China will cease to be suspicious of each other. Continuation of such suspicion, alongside China's stated claim to large parts of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, and India's determination to retake some territory it lost in 1962, serve to underpin the continuation of the Indian military build-up in general.

4.56 There have been some fairly recent, serious attempts to improve relations. In 1988, Rajiv Gandhi made the first visit to China by an Indian Prime Minister for decades. The trip seemed to be quite successful and does open up possibilities for improved relations. The highest ranking Chinese official to visit India since 1962, Vice Premier Wu Xueqian, made an official visit from 11th to 18th October 1989. That visit was also marked by cordiality. However, until a new relationship is consolidated, we can assume that Indian defence planners will continue to perceive China as a threat.

4.57 In addition to China's missile and air force capacity, and its possession of nuclear weapons, other factors continue to operate to maintain China's position as a perceived threat. Probably foremost amongst these is China's continuing close relationship with Pakistan.

4.58 Pakistan's airforce is partially equipped and trained by China, as well as the United States. There are joint U.S.-Chinese-Pakistani efforts in some areas of defence equipment development. It was Pakistan which played the role of intermediary between the United States and China during the Nixon years when the rapprochement between them took place.

Other Security Concerns

4.59 India's relations with Pakistan and China, and the international ramifications of those relations, have not been the only focus of concern for India. The strategic and political situations in the rest of South Asia, in the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean as a whole have also been important.

4.60 **South Asian Problems:** As a senior Indian military analyst, Air Commodore Jasjit Singh put it:

Western strategic and popular literature has been referring to India's emergence as a regional power...

What is forgotten by everyone is that in the context of the subcontinent alone, India was always the pre-eminent power, militarily and otherwise...¹⁴

4.61 India sees itself as having a responsibility to maintain stability within its region, but this mission inevitably carries with it the connotation of India's view of what is best. The mission is justified by India in terms of preventing great power intervention in its region in the event of instability in the smaller South Asian countries; preventing spill over effects in India of problems in neighbouring countries; and promoting democratic values against the more authoritarian regimes in some neighbouring countries. In 1989, the 'dissonance between India and the countries around her' was listed by the Defence Minister of the day as one of the four major factors influencing India's security perceptions.¹⁵ The Indian intervention in Sri Lanka in 1987, the suppression of a coup attempt by mercenaries in the Maldives in 1988, and the virtual border blockade of Nepal in 1989 demonstrate India's determination to take an aggressive view of its security interests in South Asia as a whole, with the use of coercion figuring highly in India's eventual solutions.

4.62 The Indian intervention in Sri Lanka since 1987 has been justified by an Indian commentator in the following terms:

Having been a victim of the phenomenon in 1971, India has also been concerned with the problem of internal turbulence and violence in neighbouring countries spilling over and adding to the internal security

¹⁴ Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, *Strategic and Security Perspectives of India*, Paper prepared for the Indo-US seminar held at the National Defense University, Washington, D.C., 19-21 September 1989, p.5. Singh is the Director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, India's major strategic studies centre

¹⁵ Speech by K.C. Pant at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1 July 1989

problems. The ethnic violence in Sri Lanka has held out the danger of not only the break-up of that country but also of India having to face the fall-out effects of it.

...a premature withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force from Sri Lanka would only open the flood gates of violence and anarchy, with predictable results on the environment.¹⁶

4.63 The paternalistic concern shown by India toward developments in all of its smaller neighbours also places significant demands on Indian force structure and consequently on defence expenditure.

4.64 **Persian Gulf:** India's naval build-up began after the 1965 war with Pakistan. There is little doubt that it was the experience of this war which brought the needs of the Navy into greater focus. At the same time, however, a major military build up started under the Shah of Iran. The Iranian Armed Forces were soon seen as the major military force of the Middle East and the strongest navy on the Indian Ocean littoral.

4.65 This was perceived as a problem in India. India was, and still is, dependent on Persian Gulf oil for its growing industrial base (about 30-40 per cent of India's total oil consumption is imported from the Persian Gulf). Another 35 per cent comes from off-shore oil installations. Approximately 80 per cent of India's gas requirements are also met by its off-shore facilities.¹⁷ The need to be able to guarantee the safety of oil shipments to India through the Gulf was used as an argument in favour of a stronger Indian naval force.

4.66 It was also noted in India that its dependence on Persian Gulf oil meant that it was dependent for energy on the Middle Eastern Islamic states. These states were considered the natural allies of Pakistan, especially while the India-Pakistan rivalry had a communal-religious aspect to it. Pakistan's membership of the CENTO pact also tied it to Iran.

4.67 The submission of the Melbourne South Asia Studies Group saw the instability of the Persian Gulf as one of the most important reasons for India's naval build-up. In their view:

Approximately one million Indians work in the Gulf. Indian oil supplies come from the Gulf, and India's own off-shore oil rigs are vulnerable to spillovers from warfare in the Gulf. The British policed the Gulf, partly from Bombay, for 150 years. Indian spokespeople, however, downplay the Gulf factor for diplomatic reasons. India's population contains 90 million Moslems, 11 percent of the total. Indian foreign policy has striven to maintain cordial relations with the Muslim states of West Asia...¹⁸

¹⁶ Jasjit Singh, *op. cit.*, p.15

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.22

¹⁸ *Evidence*, p.335

4.68 This sensitive situation has been balanced somewhat by India's support, as a leading Non-Aligned country, for important Arab causes, especially that of Palestine. All the same, the question of the security of India's oil supplies has remained a factor in its security preoccupations.

4.69 In the 1980s, the Persian Gulf has been proved to be a very unstable and dangerous area. The unpredictable nature of the attacks on oil tankers by Iran and Iraq created the need for some tankers to be escorted by naval vessels of various countries. While it appears tankers delivering oil to India escaped attack, India's policy of self-reliance in defence matters implies a need to build appropriate naval escort capabilities. (It is of note though that during the attacks on tankers in the Persian Gulf, India did not provide any naval escorts for tankers.)

4.70 The fall of the Shah changed the nature of India's concern with Iran. While Iran lost its supplies of American weaponry, thereby reducing its power projection capabilities, it remained an important factor for India. First, as mentioned above, a high level of insecurity was introduced into the Persian Gulf as a result of the Iran-Iraq war. There is, of course, a ceasefire presently in place but the two sides remain unreconciled.

4.71 Second, there may now be some potential for more direct collaboration between Iran and Pakistan. Both Iran and Pakistan explicitly identify with Islamic fundamentalism. There were signs of an 'Islamic alliance' developing during the rule of the late General Zia. This was manifested in the exchange of military delegations and discussions about defence cooperation. The situation has altered somewhat since the coming to power of Benazir Bhutto, whose ideological outlook does not have a lot in common with that of the Islamic Revolution. On the other hand, Bhutto's main opposition, the Islamic Democratic Alliance, and the leadership of the Armed Forces, especially General Beg, have some sympathies with Islamic fundamentalism and the policy of defence exchanges with Iran has continued.

4.72 The prospects of an 'Islamic Alliance' have now receded but Pakistan will still seek to use contacts with Iran to provide further depth to its security posture.

4.73 **Indian Ocean:** A number of submissions have emphasised the complexities of the political and security situations of the Indian Ocean littoral countries (East African countries, South Africa, the Persian Gulf countries, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia — as well as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Burma). Dr Michael McKinley in his submission described the region in the following manner:

Within the 44 independent nations washed by the Indian Ocean are found Arab, African, European, Indian and Malay peoples practising the faiths of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Taken together they constitute nearly one-third of the world's population, but this statistic by itself obscures the range of contrast — from India with more than 700 million down to Comoros with fewer than 500,000. More importantly, the region is host to a representative sample of the major ills which beset political society, domestic and international, in the

closing years of the twentieth century. It is a pathology whose constituent parts include political and social deprivation, economic under-development, colonial and post-colonial exploitation, racism, sectarianism and dynastic differences. The politics of much of the region tend, therefore, to be characterised by the relative fragility and vulnerability of democratic institutions, where they exist, but transcending this, almost permanent conflict, particularly in the so-called 'arc of instability' which stretches from the Horn of Africa round to the Indian subcontinent, including the hinterland of the littoral states.¹⁹

4.74 Dr McKinley goes on to make the point that this complex and unstable situation has attracted various manifestations of interest by external powers, from attention, to presence, to outright interference. The United States, the USSR and France have regular, though declining, naval presences. Dr McKinley sums up the essence of the situation in the region with the statement:

Overall, so riven with externally induced (and internally generated) tension and conflict is it, that the Indian Ocean basin does not so much describe a region as it does the geographic setting for fissiparous forces which result in a collection of sub-regions.²⁰

4.75 While Dr McKinley may have given unusual emphasis to the factors for instability, his views were useful because they show that it is not only Indian defence analysts who refer to this complex environment when discussing the expansion of India's military capabilities. The instability of the region is especially emphasised by Indian analysts when referring to India's need to defend its 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Because of India's massive peninsular shape and its offshore islands, the EEZ is a huge area of 2.5 million sq km.

Foreign Policy Ideology

4.76 ***India's Perception of its International Role:*** India's response to its security situation has been moulded by its foreign policy ideology. India has always been very assertive and individual in its foreign policy line. As early as 1947, this line was expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru as follows:

Our general policy is to avoid entanglement in power politics and not to join any group of powers as against any other group. The two leading groups today are the Russian bloc and the Anglo-American bloc. We must be friendly to both and yet not join either. Both America and Russia are extraordinarily suspicious of each other as well as of other countries. This makes our path difficult and we may well be suspected by each of leaning towards the other. This cannot be helped ... The Soviet Union, being our neighbour, we shall inevitably develop close

¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp.80-81

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.81

relations with it. We cannot afford to antagonize Russia merely because we think that this may irritate someone else. Nor indeed can we antagonize the USA.²¹

4.77 Prime Minister Nehru, along with President Tito of Yugoslavia and President Nasser of Egypt, was a founding father of the Non-Aligned Movement, and India has since been a leading member. Its allegiance to this group has had two major planks. First, India has been a strong supporter of the decolonisation process and has vigorously opposed any signs of Western resistance to decolonisation. Second, it has been a strong opponent of what it sees as unjustified superpower influence. The other side of this stance has been its emphasis on the right of the newly independent countries to have freedom from superpower pressure in decision making, including in foreign affairs and defence.

4.78 India's foreign policy outlook has had a major impact in the area of defence planning and policy. It has meant that India has avoided tying its defence to any military alliance with a major power. India has signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union but this Treaty falls quite a way short of a military alliance relationship such as the USSR has with its Warsaw Pact partners. The Treaty does not commit the USSR to immediate military support to India in the event of a war. The Treaty has nonetheless been important in terms of assistance with defence supplies, as well as broader political and economic relations.

4.79 As a result of this Treaty and of the high level of cooperation with the Soviet Union on defence equipment matters, some commentators have categorised India as an ally of the Soviet Union. (The recent issue of *Soviet Military Power* by the United States Department of Defense is typical of media statements to this effect in that it shows India in red on a map of the world along with a number of Third World countries and the USSR's communist allies.) The Committee was interested to note, however, that the majority of submissions it received did not share this view. It is also the Committee's own assessment that India's status vis-a-vis the USSR is not one of military ally. According to the Australian Department of Defence:

The USSR is India's second largest trading partner (after the US) and is the major supplier of India's defence needs. The relationship however is a pragmatic one. India is not a client state of the USSR.²²

4.80 India has not allowed any permanent Soviet military presence in India. India does not conduct joint exercises with the USSR. India has insisted on high levels of Indian based manufacture, even when purchasing Soviet military equipment. As a result, a number of Soviet designed systems (including aircraft), as well as spare parts, are actually manufactured in India. The USSR even

²¹ Quoted in K.P.S. Menon, 'India and the Soviet Union', in B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Indian Foreign Policy: The Nehru Years*, Delhi, 1976, pp.134-135

²² *Evidence*, p.220. The Committee notes that the USSR slipped from being the second largest trading partner of India in 1985-86 to being third largest in 1986-87, being displaced by Japan, according to Indian Government statistics. The USSR's relative weight in India's trade has continued to decline slightly.

obtains some spare parts for its own aircraft from the Indian manufacturers. Indian shipyards also build major warships, such as frigates. India has not allowed its relationship with the USSR to prevent it from seeking defence equipment from NATO countries as well. It purchased its second aircraft carrier from the United Kingdom and has modern French and British jet combat aircraft. It is currently working with the United States on the design for a light combat aircraft. It has purchased artillery from Bofors in Sweden. India has also been looking at a French design for a new aircraft carrier.

4.81 India's non-aligned stance and support for decolonisation has meant that it has shared some important foreign policy stances with the USSR. These include its friendly relations with Vietnam, for example. On other issues where it has had a similar position to the USSR, it has also followed its own variation. On Afghanistan, for example, it refused to condemn the initial Soviet occupation. On the other hand, it has worked for some time to enable the Soviet Union to withdraw. Its position on Afghanistan, including its formal recognition of and friendly attitude towards the Najibullah Government, is also influenced by its relations with Pakistan.

4.82 In the economic area, India has also pursued policies aimed at securing its economic independence. Its policy of large scale public ownership of industry has enabled it to develop a substantial industrial base without calling in foreign capital to the same extent as other former colonial countries. It has also protected its consumer goods market through a strict policy of import-substitution and exclusion of foreign products. In this sense, its policies can be characterised as aimed at achieving indigenous, non-dependent, capitalist economic development. The public sector has aimed to establish an environment relatively free of the influence of foreign business, and intended to enable both the big Indian business houses as well as small and middle level businesses to flourish.

4.83 India has also played an important role in promoting the concept of the New International Economic Order and cooperation amongst the 'South' in the North-South dialogue. It has hosted major conferences of the 'South' countries.

Domestic Politics and Indian Defence Policy

4.84 In the 1980s, India has become more assertive in its aspirations for status and recognition. As the submission of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade stated:

India's strategic outlook springs partly from its determination to have a say in regional and world affairs and partly from its geographical location. India has a pre-eminent role in the South Asian region, which is predicated on its large population, economic strength, military capability, its ancient civilisation and cultural heritage and its leading voice in Third World and global forums. Statements by spokesmen for India's political elite, such as Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, reflect a

desire to secure India's rightful place as a great civilization in the upper ranks of the world's nations; a rank denied it, in the Indian view, by many centuries of foreign domination and exploitation.²³

4.85 According to evidence given to the Committee, the policy of ensuring maximum independence of action has been reinforced by increasing disenchantment with the failure of the international community to accord to India the prestige or status it believes it deserves. This disenchantment is, reportedly, greatest amongst the newer Indian middle class:

India is a great power with a burgeoning middle class — a middle class that is anxious to shed the image of beggar India which is so widely prevalent here. That middle class will applaud any expansion of Indian defence forces.²⁴

4.86 The argument suggests that many Indians feel that India as the second largest country in the world, with the third largest number of scientists and technologists, a large and growing industrial sector, and one of the leading non-aligned nations is not being treated accordingly. For example, it is not a member of the inner club of permanent members of the UN Security Council.

4.87 The former Indian Government of Rajiv Gandhi, by turning India into a fully-fledged regional military power, was seen as responding to this desire of the middle class for enhanced national prestige and status. The analysts who present this view do not suggest that the desire for national status and prestige had developed into a desire for an expansion of national territory or other forms of naked aggression. At the same time, the actual exercise by India of its position as the dominant regional power has included such actions as the 1989 partial economic blockade on Nepal and the military interventions, at the request of the host Governments, in Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

4.88 The Committee notes that almost all the submissions it received on this issue, including those of the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs and Trade, emphasised that India's desire, as a more confident and technologically advanced country, for regional and even world power status was a major cause of India's defence build-up. These submissions also emphasised what they considered to be the relatively 'benign' aspect to India's efforts to gain recognition as a major power. The key argument here was that India wanted such things as a blue water navy, a nuclear submarine and a modern airforce as status symbols and for the prestige such items delivered in the conduct of international relations.

4.89 The importance of defence capability as a symbol of the nationalist concerns of the new Indian middle class was mentioned in the comments of Dr Chakrabarty of the Melbourne South Asian Studies Group:

Defence within India is one of the most, I would think, uncontested areas of Indian policy. There is very little debate in the Indian media about the desirability or otherwise of the naval expansion and the sorts

²³ *ibid.*, p.805

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.354

of things that you were talking about. There is some, but on the whole the absence of debate indicates the very strength of the kind of nationalism that the middle class has. Last year, when India went into the Maldives...the newspaper editorials were talking about putting India back into the Indian Ocean. I think that is very reflective of a large body of the middle class desiring to see India emerge as some kind of world power, which you cannot be without the naval strength that you can project.²⁵

4.90 The Australian Department of Defence commented in its submission that while the nature and scope of India's naval programme were not directed at any specific operational objective, they 'do accord...with its aspirations to major power status and its concern to consolidate its status as the dominant power in South Asia'.²⁶

4.91 The symbolic significance of India's new defence capability was also mentioned in the evidence of Dr McPherson, Director of the Centre for Indian Ocean Regional Studies at Curtin University:

Within the last 20 years there has been the creation of a middle class of 100 million people. It is a real middle class with many, for want of a better word, capitalist aspirations.

That part of Indian society which runs India now is locked into the concept of progress and new technology. I think this is part of the procedure. These people are in some way more nationalist than the people who fought the nationalist movement in terms of their perceptions about India's place in the world. India is now a modern country. We have had these generations of being looked down upon.

What are the symbols of a modern country? What are the symbols of power and progress? A nuclear submarine ranks very highly in that... I went to their Republic Day parade in January... This year, for the first time, it was technology — the army, the navy, and all sorts of other technology.²⁷

4.92 Dr Samina Yasmeen of the University of Western Australia explained the new phenomenon in the following manner:

Over a period of time, they [the leaders] have seen that the non-aligned flag does not work any more... Indian society has become more realistic. Indians realise that the moral argument does not work any more and that India needs to have the military behind it.²⁸

4.93 During the 1950s and 1960s, status and prestige flowed to India as a leading spokesman for the non-aligned movement. As the movement's role has changed, and with a number of non-aligned countries becoming aligned, particularly with the West, India seems to have adopted the same 'currency of international relations' as many others — the prestige that flows from military

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.360

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.223

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.57-58

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.69

power. It will not be lost on Indian politicians that the world at large has paid more heed to India on account of its increased military power than it ever did because of its leadership of the non-aligned movement.

Conclusion

4.94 The Committee concluded that India's defence build-up is now motivated as much by a desire to achieve recognition as a major power as by battlefield experiences of four wars and fears for India's security. The Committee also believes that the role of India's defence forces in the military build-up is related to the question of prestige and status rather than expansionist objectives. The Committee notes, however, that the new emphasis in the conduct of India's foreign policy on the role of military power may have brought with it a disconcerting predisposition to use force.

4.95 The Committee considers that the mystery that is sometimes considered to surround this issue, its so-called 'intriguing' quality, has been exaggerated. The mutual interactions between threat perceptions flowing from past wars, a strong ideology supporting non-alignment and independence, and the impact of the new nationalism of India's growing middle class together quite adequately explain these defence policies.

4.96 At the same time, as the final chapter of this report will address in more detail, India's intentions alone do not determine the outcome of international interactions. The Committee is strongly of the view that India has a responsibility as a member of the international community not to raise concerns among its neighbours that Indian military capability might be used against them without direct provocation. In fact, India has a responsibility to defuse such concerns and to promote de-escalation of tension, especially the arms race between it and Pakistan.

4.97 The Committee agrees with the current Australian Government's view that India does not represent a threat to Australia or countries of South East Asia. On the other hand, the Committee considers that increased militarisation of South Asia is harmful for the region. Australia continues to urge India to accede to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

4.98 The following chapter will discuss some general features of India's military effort and three specific aspects of Indian military capability that have raised most concern: power projection capabilities; nuclear weapons proliferation (and ballistic missile proliferation); and the threat to sea lanes.