

## **India's Paramilitary Forces**

Creation of paramilitary forces usually reflects the shifting security situation in a country, in other words countries whose police forces are unable to adequately tackle and accomplish their role and also require auxiliary military support during their operations (because of various reasons such as ethnic diversity, landmass of the country, overall geography, constant militant or terrorist threats etc.) often leads to a creation of paramilitary forces which are specialized for different tasks or situations. India as a large country has been having a variety of security issues from the colonial times till today. Furthermore a federal country like India also has a large number of paramilitary forces deployed in many federative states across its territory.

India is a very heterogeneous state with different religions, social castes, cultures, classes, languages and so on. In this heterogeneous environment internal conflicts can be dangerous and can lead to a spectrum of different political and state consequences, therefore for the Indian government questions of internal security have always been a key concern. India's authority has been challenged throughout the years by a variety of internal factors. Unlike other countries India refrained itself from using the military in order to sort out its domestic issues. Instead there has been a growth and frequent usage of paramilitary forces.

Prime objective of the paramilitary forces is to maintain internal order which is the responsibility of each state's government. This also includes securing borders, especially with Pakistan. Over the time the paramilitary forces grew at a phenomenal rate. For example: the Border Security Force (BSF) is one of the largest paramilitary forces in the world and its duties extend much further than just protecting the border or maintaining peace. Because of the growing phenomena a new question arose: are the federal states the main entities which create and control these paramilitary groups? The central government was quick to assert this issue with the constitution which provides general framework in which paramilitary forces can expand and evolve. The vague explanation in the constitution of the control over these units is cleverly used by the central government in order to manipulate and control federal states' power over all internal security forces.

The sharp rise of paramilitary forces happened in the eighties mainly because of the unrest in the regions of Punjab, Kashmir and Jammu and mass spreading of communal violence in other parts of the country. At that time the Indian government further centralized the country and its authority over security forces. This move was deemed by some political parties as an authoritarian and threatening to the country's overall democracy. However the paramilitary is a civilian institution which is under the jurisdiction of the state's police, therefore the employment of these units cannot be deemed as an undemocratic or authoritarian unlike the employment of the military in the internal security matters which directly contributes to the erosion of legitimacy and democratic framework overall. Defining the terms of military and paramilitary is very

important, especially in countries which have internal security issues. There are cases where domestic instability and violence led to a greater military involvement in the internal affairs of the country which later ended in a military take-over.

The paramilitary forces have proven to be a valuable asset for India's internal security. Lately they are being deployed even to maintain law and order or execute regular police duties which questions the capabilities of regular police units. It seems that the police is unable to cope with the rising levels of violence and their role in the society is starting to diminish. The constant employment and development of the paramilitary forces eventually pushed the police out of the picture. Neglecting regular police units deteriorated their capabilities and further demoralized its ranks. Although the decline of the regular police doesn't seem to affect the central government it can have major consequences on the paramilitary. As I mentioned earlier the paramilitary forces are specialized in different activities which regular police units are unable to accomplish, however putting additional or regular police work on their time table can put additional pressure on these units. This could result in lack of rest, continuous or constant rotation between the outposts, long absences from home and family etc. can finally lead to dissatisfaction among paramilitary units.

Paramilitary forces are specialized agencies but they cannot and should not replace local law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement agencies have a preventive function and can also serve as a confidence or peace building asset in troubled areas or regions, unlike paramilitary units which should be used when the threat is imminent or has implications to endanger a wider public.

In the following section I'll do my best to present some of India's paramilitary forces: Border Security Force (BSF), Assam Rifles, Indian Coast Guard, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), SashastraSeemaBal (SSB), Special Frontier Force (SFF) and National Security Guard.

**Border Security Force (BSF)** was formed in the sixties with the primary role to guard the Indian international borders and prevent trans-border crimes. Estimated strength of the BSF is 240,000 personnel which makes it the largest border patrol force in the world. Border Security Force is divided among directorates which are charged with different duties such are: Communication, Training, Engineering, Administration, Personnel, Finance etc. Roles which BSF performs include: prevention of crime, smuggling and unauthorized entry; collecting intelligence; maintaining law and order in case of a conflict; guiding the Indian Army in the border areas; assisting refugees and so on. The BSF was especially active during the Indo-Pakistan war in 1971. The unit also played a very important role during the Liberation of Bangladesh. BSF also has an elite commando unit called the "Creek Crocodile Commando" with around 40 commandos. The unit is usually deployed to a very hostile terrain consisting of mangroves and channels which are highly inaccessible, main objective of this unit is to prevent any potential insurgency in these hostile areas.

**Assam Rifles** date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the British colonial rule over India. The unit has been transformed and renamed a couple of times when finally in 1917 they adopted the current name. The unit was established in the Assam region serving as a police and protection unit against tribal raids on settlements. Throughout the history Assam Rifles were usually portrayed as a "right arm of the police and left arm of the military". In World War I the unit was dispatched to Europe and the Middle East while during the Second World War the Assam Rifles were engaged against the Japanese and their onslaught in East Asia. In the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the role of the unit evolved, Assam Rifles were active during earthquakes, floods, helping with refugees and providing overall assistance to the civilian population. The Assam Rifles are under the control of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs with current size of 46 battalions. Their primary roles are: countering insurgencies, guarding borders, providing help to civilians in emergency situations while also providing medical assistance and education in remote areas.

**The Indian Coast Guard** has been established in 1978 under the Ministry of Defense. The Coast Guard is split among five regions:

- Western Region with HQ in Mumbai
- Eastern Region with HQ in Chennai
- North East Region with HQ in Kolkata
- North West Region with HQ in Gandhinagar
- Andaman and Nicobar Region with HQ in Port Blair

The Indian Navy proposed the formation of such unit in the sixties primarily to provide a non-military support and maritime services to the nation. In the sixties sea-borne smuggling was seriously threatening overall Indian economy and the Indian Navy couldn't provide all the needed assistance to prevent such actions. Today missions of the ICG include: national defense during hostilities, providing protection to artificial islands and offshore installations, overall maritime protection, search and rescue, coastal security, preservation of marine ecosystem, anti smuggling operation and scientific data collection and support. The unit has around 5,400 personnel which are serving as either a technician or a sailor. All ICG personnel undergo basic military training.

**The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)** has been formed in 1962 with a duty of guarding the over two thousand kilometers long border with the Tibet, autonomous region of China. The unit operates in an extremely difficult environment and weather conditions. All personnel in this unit undergo a specialized and very difficult training period in order to be prepared for the harsh conditions of the terrain. The troops for the ITBP can be deployed on the altitude of 18,000 feet. Main roles of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police are: preventing any border violations and securing the domestic population, preventing illegal immigration and smuggling, restoring order if some kind of disturbance occurs and maintain peace. The HQ of the ITBP is in New Delhi.

**Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)** was set up during the Sino-Indian War in 1963 as a unit which could control the border population and develop capabilities to counter the Chinese and promote resistance among population. The SSB was extremely successful in implementing various guerilla tactics against the enemy. Today the SSB is one of India's Central Armed Police Forces under the control of Ministry of Home Affairs. Main roles of the unit are: securing and promoting peace in the border areas, preventing trans-border crimes and illegal immigration and also preventing smuggling or similar illegal activities.

**Special Frontier Force (SFF)** was formed as a special commando unit composed mostly of Tibetan resistance fighters in northern India. The Idea behind this was to have a specialized unit which is capable of engaging enemy in mountainous terrain or behind enemy lines. SFF was formed in 1962 with a main goal to conduct covert operations behind Chinese lines during the Sino-Indian War. Today the unit has around 10,000 active personnel and is under the control of Ministry of Defense. To become a member of the force requires an extensive training program which lasts for 9 months. SFF personnel are trained to master mountain and Arctic warfare in order to survive and fight in difficult conditions, troops also undergo amphibious and parachute training. Finally the troops engage in jungle training and jungle warfare which is deemed as one of toughest military exercises since more men succumb to the nature than to the enemy. The special Jungle Group of the SFF are considered to be experts in their field able to carry out difficult operations for extended periods of time in various environments. Current roles of the Special Frontier Force are: counter-terrorism, intelligence gathering, training foreign military, hostage rescue, direct action, unconventional warfare and covert operations.

**National Security Guard (NSG)** is integrated in the Central Armed Police Forces structure. The unit was formed in the eighties with the goal of safeguarding the unity of India and preventing anti-national attempts that aim at destroying the society. The NSG commandos were first used in 1984 to counter terrorist and insurgent activities in Punjab province, after that their activities were increased and the NSG troops have been employed in many parts of the country. The unit has around 14,000 personnel and is modeled similarly to German GSG9 special unit. NSG consists of a task-orientated force and two complementary groups in the form of Special Action Group and Special Ranger Group, these groups are further divided into smaller task forces. Members of the group have an extensive 14 months training which includes physical fitness, endurance and various kinds of exhausting or stressful situations which further pushes the troops. Only those who successfully complete the whole training are later sent on an advance 9 months training and only then they are introduced into the NSG. Main goals of the NSG are: combating terrorism and terrorist threats, preventing or countering hijack situations both on land or in air, neutralizing bombs or other explosives and hostage rescue. National Security Guard is deemed as one of the finest Special Forces in the world.

Sources used:

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- Paramilitary Forces of India

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