

India's Military Power: A General Reflects,

by Lt Gen H.C. Dutta, PVSM (Retd.), New Delhi: Manas Publications,
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*Y.M. Bammi**

In this book, the author—a distinguished officer of the Indian Army who retired as an Army Commander in 1983—has written about his experiences and important events in his 37 years of military life. He was commissioned in 1948 in the first batch of gentlemen cadets from the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun, in post-independence India. He witnessed the Partition of the country and the reorganisation of the Indian Armed Forces, which gave him an insight into the many facets of national security at the grassroots level. A keen student and fond of outdoor life, he joined the infantry. Initially commissioned into 4/2 Gorkha Rifles (GR), he was transferred to 5/8 GR as 2 GR opted for the British Army.

In the book, he has briefly covered his military life at each rank and posting, from controlling post-independence riots in Calcutta, learning mountaineering at the High Altitude Warfare School at Gulmarg, carrying out counter-insurgency operations in the Naga Hills, to participating in the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War (during which he was commanding his unit, 5/8 GR, in Chhamb), interspersed with prestigious training and staff assignments, including the Staff College

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course in Canada. He had two tenures at the Army Headquarters: as a Brigadier in the Military Operations branch, and then as the Deputy Chief of the Army Staff (where his wide charter of duties encompassed reorganisation and modernisation of the army, including equipment procurement) with the rank of Lieutenant General (Lt Gen). These gave him an opportunity to work with civilian officials in the Ministry of Defence, which further enhanced his understanding of the nuances of national security. Serving twice at the College of Combat, Mhow (first as Commander, Senior Command Wing, and then as the Commandant), he introduced innovative techniques for studying warfare, including the importance of inter-service cooperation.

Besides factual narration which makes interesting reading, the value of the book lies in his 'reflections' on the problems faced by our army, for which he offers suggestions and measures to overcome them. This makes the book much more vibrant and topical.

The need for strengthening the inter-services ethos of our army, navy and air force, the necessity of revamping the mechanism and procedures of functioning of our Ministry of Defence and the importance of creating a more vibrant security culture in our country are a few important aspects covered in the book. His views on training for 'future wars' and analysis of 'internal and external threats' to our national security as well as suggestions to reorganise our commands as integrated 'Theatre Commands', make the book relevant for military and non-military readers.

The book is spread over 12 chapters, with a few photographs, and the author has lucidly and honestly narrated a few events from his personal life along with how he faced those challenges. While expressing his views on military matters, he has explained military terms in simple words for easy understanding by non-military readers.

The book has a Foreword by an eminent and distinguished military leader of our army with a reputation of being a thinking general, Lt Gen S.C. Sinha, PVSM (Retd.). Read along with the Preface, it provides a curtain raiser on 'reflections' on our existing military culture, with special emphasis on 'civil-military matters' and 'inter-service cooperation'.

Born in west Pakistan and educated in Lahore, the author briefly describes his family history and events of the Partition of India, and narrates how he joined the IMA in 1946. Life and training in the IMA was tough, but he enjoyed the outdoor activities and did well in them. He also made a few lifelong friends, some of who later went over to Pakistan.

He feels that the 'grooming' in the IMA has played an important role in his later life. It emphasised honesty, integrity and sense of loyalty to the country, besides creating team spirit, physical toughness and mental robustness. He opines that such a regimen in grooming mind, body and spirit is essential for the young boys and girls today as it will make them good citizens and leaders in any field.

Dutta has analysed all the wars fought by independent India. He brings out that the armed forces of India have always remained apolitical. Our soldiers have upheld the unity and integrity of India with full dedication and loyalty, often sacrificing their lives in the process. In this, the role played by the army has been predominant, while the navy and air force have also played a vital part. Thus, the nation must allocate adequate resources for the modernisation and training for our armed forces, so that they always remain alert and prepared to face challenges from external aggression and internal disturbances. The great contribution made by the armed forces (mainly the army) in fighting and controlling insurgency and terrorism in the North-East (and now Jammu and Kashmir) also proves the unflinching loyalty of Indian servicemen (of all three services) towards their arm, services, unit and the country.

He further emphasises that the nation must recognise the sacrifices made by the armed forces and look after the welfare and social needs of the servicemen and their families. The government needs to be more sensitive to their needs so that incidents like the agitation for 'one rank one pension' (OROP) are avoided. Due to peculiarities of service conditions, our soldiers retire at a young age when they still have family obligations. Today, they face difficulty in getting re-employment. He recommends their lateral induction into paramilitary forces, which will make this second line of defence of our country more efficient and effective. He states that much can be achieved in this field by developing cordial relations between the armed forces and the civil administration by holding regular civil–military liaison conferences.

Dutta opines that India lacks the culture of national security and there is no debate on security issues in the public. The policymakers and political masters are often guided by the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers who mostly have little knowledge of military matters. The Ministry of Defence controls all projects having financial implications, which often impinges on the battle readiness and efficiency of the forces. It also results in inter-service rivalry as the three services vie for more funds for their projects. The procurement procedures, the role of Defence

Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), the foreign suppliers and the fear of bribes in defence deals further create delays and mar the military potential of the armed forces. He feels that there is an urgent need to smoothen these procedures. Dutta lauds the 'Make in India' policy and hopes it will result in greater saving of foreign exchange.

The author has gone into a fair amount of detail regarding the likely 'external threat to our security' from Pakistan and China, individually or together. He sees a scenario of a 'War under Nuclear threat, combined with cyber attacks'. Also, low-intensity operations in disturbed regions of our country may get encouragement and support for insurgency, terrorism and militancy. Though large-scale exercises are ideal, often there are financial constraints. This can be mitigated by conducting war games (map and sand model exercises) on future battlefield scenarios, so that all the stakeholders understand their roles in future wars.

The author makes a strong case for appointing a permanent Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) with adequate staff and powers, so that the national leadership gets a single-point advice on all matters relating to national security. He laments that the lack of full integration between the three services is also affecting our national security, especially in budgetary and procurement matters. He points out that while various studies after each war and at the initiative of the government (like the Group of Ministers Report after the Kargil War of 1999 and the more recent Naresh Chandra Committee Report) have made such recommendations, these have not been implemented fully, mainly due to bureaucratic objections. While an integrated theatre command for Andaman and Nicobar Islands has been created and Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff has been formed, a permanent CDS is yet to be appointed.

Dutta highlights that while serving on United Nations (UN) missions abroad, contingents of the Indian Armed Forces have earned laurels for the country. There are also a number of our training teams abroad, joint exercises with a number of friendly countries and a large number of foreign students who train at our military institutions. We have also provided military assistance as humanitarian aid during natural calamities, and are jointly participating in ensuring safe passage of ships through the sea lanes off the Somali Coast through Arabian Sea. Thus, our armed forces play a very important role in strengthening our relations with friendly countries—an aspect which needs to be further enhanced. Besides the interaction between the ministries of Defence and

External Affairs, closer relations between the services and the Ministry of External Affairs are also needed. This can be achieved by exchange of officers of Joint Secretary–Brigadier level in the Integrated Defence Staff.

In conclusion, Lt Gen Dutta stresses that for ensuring security of the country, it is imperative that all component of national security are merged and a cohesive long-term threat perspective is drawn. The armed forces need to be integrated, organised, trained and equipped as per future battlefield requirement. A permanent CDS must be appointed at the earliest, so that the political leadership gets single-point advice on defence matters. A permanent CDS will also be able to ensure full and smooth integration of the three services, as well monitor interse priorities for allocation of defence funds. For better understanding and smooth functioning of the armed forces with the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of External Affairs, he recommends a longer tenure for civilian bureaucrats and their cross postings in service headquarters.

The book has value for civil and defence readers alike. It is recommended for libraries of civil and military institutions.

