

# The origins of Indian defence policy: 1947–1962

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Indian defence policy between 1947 and 1962 is traditionally seen as an era when policy was well co-ordinated with foreign and economic policy—defence expenditure only rose significantly after the 1962 war. However, a closer look at the origins of Indian defence policy seem to show that it was a far more complex and confused process where, possibly, the armed forces managed to overcome their political and bureaucratic opponents and procure a great deal more equipment than was probably necessary or affordable. Moreover, it would seem that this process received at least the tacit approval of Nehru, who may not have thought through correctly the links between non-alignment and defence policy, or who saw a future role for India in global military affairs.

*Keywords:* Indian defence, defence procurement, history, Nehru, armed forces, military expenditure, defence missions.

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As with so many other nation states the origins of Indian defence policy are invariably understood in relation to the existence, or perceived existence, of threats to territorial integrity and the need to protect sovereignty. Yet as many studies from countries such as the United States have shown, the process is much more complex and less rational than is generally understood (e.g., Allison 1971). Certainly, reactions to the actions of others is a common enough element which both drives and shapes defence policy—few defence policies move in fits and starts in line with security perceptions. In countries with smaller industrial and bureaucratic sectors and smaller defence budgets, especially those in the South, the potential for bargaining, infighting and inertia is much diminished but still exists.

Understanding the roots and dynamics of defence policies is, therefore, only partially to do with an appreciation of political and military activities within a given security region, or complex (Buzan 1987: 69-130). It has also a great deal to do with sectoral fiscal balances, available technologies, funding and individual perceptions.

In this respect, defence and security studies in developing countries are not a well understood area, even though copious work has been produced on the effect of military expenditures on development and the role of military institutions in politics. In the case of India, the situation is less imperfect. In several respects India has a strong intellectual and institutional tradition in defence, disarmament and security studies and, of

course, it is a country which has always received a great deal of attention from non-Indian scholars (e.g., Vertzberger 1984).

Nevertheless, the origins of Indian defence policy, as distinct from foreign policy, are much less well understood. A great deal of attention has been placed upon the particular role of Jawaharlal Nehru on the international stage and his unique attempt to steer India away from the Cold War. However, given India's intense period of armament through the 1980s, which required massive hikes in defence expenditure and foreign exchange outlays and given too the country's military pre-eminence in South Asia, it would seem important to understand more fully the dynamics of defence policy, especially from an internal, domestic viewpoint.

Any survey of Indian security studies will quickly reveal that Indian defence issues appear to have a starting point in 1962 (e.g., Thomas 1978). After a decade and a half of low-key activity in the defence sector, the country was unequivocally humiliated by China—a defeat which still holds an important position in the national psyche. To an extent this is true, Indian defence policy did change markedly in 1964 and defence expenditure began its upward rise immediately after the war. However, this has tended to obscure the fifteen year period between 1947 and the Sino-Indian War, the era when many of the fundamental decisions must have been taken, or at least considered. Indeed, as the following article seeks to demonstrate, there did exist a significant degree of defence activity during this era. Furthermore, an understanding of this period may offer interesting data for a clearer understanding of India's defence dynamics and motivations subsequently.

Since independence India has fought three wars with Pakistan (1947, 1965 and 1971) and one with China (1962). Since the humiliating defeat by China successive Indian governments have purposefully given defence a high profile. In the immediate aftermath of the 1962 war, decision makers and the government's critics concentrated upon three sets of reasons for both the failure to prevent defeat and, also, the abortive attempts to check the apparent scale of the humiliation and the ineptitude of the defence effort.

First, Nehru was severely criticized for misreading Chinese intentions and failing to prepare for war. This failure was seen to be a by-product of non-alignment, but this was a rather simplistic interpretation of a very complex situation which turned on India's economic weakness and determination to remain politically independent in a competitive bipolar system (Rana 1976). Second, Krishna Menon was criticized for under-equipping the armed forces, although this too was at best also a simplified and misleading view of what Menon was attempting to do within the Ministry of Defence—if India was to become a significant defence producer it was inevitable that defence resources would have to be reallocated to boost domestic efforts to both the temporary and long term detriment of imports. Third, received wisdom widely considered the country to be under-defended (Thomas 1978). Indian leaders were assumed to have lacked the political will to ensure adequate defence arrangements between 1947 and 1962 to guard against the threat from the northeast. As a result, when the Chinese attacked India the armed forces proved incapable of mounting a defensive campaign.

Surprisingly, given the national importance of this war, the question of preparedness has only been lightly covered by Indian defence analysts—conclusions rest more on assumptions and received wisdom passed down through the years than on empirical research. It is generally considered to be unimportant because during this period defence expenditure was extremely low, procurement modest and, more generally, defence was the junior partner of development on the one hand and non-alignment on the other. In fact, this was not the case. Defence had a life of its own and was a significantly more prominent sector than most, if not all, analysts have thus far suggested. This can be illustrated by a better understanding of what India was spending and acquiring for defence purposes where it can be shown that the period between 1947 and 1962 was extremely important, both qualitatively and quantitatively. It was during this period that many of the key debates concerning future defence and foreign policy were decided upon and, contrary to popular opinion, it appears to be the case that Indian decision makers were more ambitious than they were cautious, especially

on the procurement side. This entailed rather more expenditure than is immediately obvious from the observable allocations to the defence sector. It also required the sanctioning of key defence missions, which added up to a defence posture which conflicted with the statements made by Nehru and others during that period, however weak the country may have been in one particular theatre.

### *Defence before independence*

Prior to independence, defence was a neglected aspect of thinking amongst the leaders of the Indian National Congress (INC). When defence issues did emerge they were usually in the context of industrialization strategy: a free India would strive to develop defence industries under public ownership subject to the ability of the state to mobilize sufficient resources and capacity (INC 1954: 32). Generally, the INC collectively assumed that a free India would be relatively secure from attack and invasion on the basis of natural frontiers and its neutral and peaceful status as a post-empire state. This propensity to ignore defence was strengthened further by the primacy of non-cooperation and non-violence in Indian thinking and the overwhelming concentration of the struggle for independence as an end in itself. Furthermore, Pakistan was not a consideration until the eve of independence and few senior INC members foresaw major tensions emerging with other countries.

When Nehru became a prominent member of the INC he shared many of his colleagues' assumptions concerning the future defence of independent India (Nehru 1936). However, Nehru had no real platform to build upon. Gandhi gave little thought to the national defence issue but wished to institutionalize non-violence when India became independent, which would certainly have had major implications for future defence plans. In stark contrast to the prevailing Gandhian ethic based upon non-violence, non-co-operation and anti-militarism, Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, subsequently the leader of the Indian National Army (INA), gradually developed their own independent views on defence and both argued for the creation

of a military capability based on a defence industry under solely public ownership.<sup>1</sup>

This stress upon development, strength and efficiency, albeit at a highly generalized level, was complemented by Nehru's support for science policy, remarkable for a 'Third World' leader but not perhaps for the first prime minister of India (Vishvanathan 1985). Nehru was fascinated throughout his life by modern science and its potential role in an independent industrial India,

It is science alone that can solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of vast resources running to waste, of a rich country inhabited by a starving people. . . . The future belongs to those who make friends with science (quoted in Ram 1966: 2).

Nehru envisaged a major partnership in the future between the scientific community and the armed forces in the same way as he worked towards similar partnerships for economic development.

### *Independence and the formation of defence policy*

Beyond the occasional references to defence and security the INC came to power in 1947 without a defence policy of much substance. However, once independence had been achieved Nehru, as the first Prime Minister, was confronted with the task of moulding post-partition India into a viable nation state. Partition and the impact of the First Round had highlighted the problem of defence and sovereignty and had given both a sense of urgency. In this context, as India's Prime Minister, Nehru had three major problems to confront.

First, although the INA had been emasculated by the British some years before independence, a legacy remained insofar as the ideas and example of Bose, who died in 1946, appealed to those concerned with direct action and ethnic unity. Moreover, Bose attempted to align himself with the Axis powers during the war and also peddled a political philosophy which conflicted directly with the teaching and example of Gandhi,

Bose viewed the INA and its officers in highly political terms. Like the military of totalitarian states, the INA was regarded as a center (or one

of the main centers) of politics and national regeneration. It was the model of an Indian 'people's army', a military organization truly representative of the nation, the focus of national attention, the servant of a neo-totalitarian ideology (Cohen 1971: 162-63).

For the Congress leadership it was a difficult circle to square. First, the INA unequivocally and deliberately compromised the ethic of non-violence and much of what the INC stood for. Second, it would have been a substantial political risk for the Congress to alienate such a powerful group. Third, the INA had challenged the monopoly of the INC as the body which had achieved independence, albeit without success.

Somewhat fortunately for the INC, Bose died in 1946 and with him went the charismatic leadership of the movement and the INA gradually faded away as a political force. However, the threat of resurgence and the existence of an old guard remained as problems. Nevertheless, Nehru would undoubtedly have been mindful that the spectre of militarism had emerged within India bringing with it the possibility, albeit distant, of an active role for the military in the Indian political process.<sup>2</sup>

The second problem which influenced defence policy after 1947 was partition. Naturally, early policy makers had no idea that partition would accompany independence. Also, partition readjusted completely the erstwhile policy based upon India's relative power in the region, about which the INC leadership was so confident before independence. Through partition India lost the deep port of Karachi—strategically important for naval docking purposes—and many of the natural features which could have inhibited territorial invasion, although India's geopolitical importance remained largely unchanged. In addition, India acquired a significant additional security problem in the form of Pakistan.

The third problem which influenced defence policy in the formative period was that the creation of a new state in the region provided an extra avenue for major powers to project power and influence further and an opportunity for competition by proxy; the history of superpower influence in South Asia would have been markedly different without the creation of Pakistan. Nehru made a conscious attempt to sidestep the Cold War and avoid being dragged into the force field of superpower

politics. This led initially to a policy of neutralism which later became more active in the form of non-alignment. Here, Nehru and Menon were being primarily pragmatic. If the Congress Party was to survive the early years of independence, it was essential for it to meet at least some of the rising expectations of the masses following the departure of the British. This is not to doubt the sincerity of Nehru's foreign policy, his commitment to a 'third force' and his role within the United Nations, but, pressing domestic concerns were also a factor which influenced the evolution of foreign policy—a guns without butter routine for India could have been political suicide for the Congress Party.

During the first decade of independence, Nehru was determined to industrialize the Indian economy and bring millions above the poverty line, all within the framework of democratic socialism. In order to achieve this end, Nehru realized that defence expenditure had to be subject to the strictest control. Consequently, between 1947 and 1962, defence expenditure was low, averaging no more than 2 per cent of GNP per annum (Thomas 1978: 102–5). During this period NNP increased unevenly and the rate of growth fluctuated between 1 and 4 per cent. Allowing for an increase in population of over 2 per cent, very little was left over for increases in standards of living, investment, or indeed, improvements to the national security apparatus (Chaudhuri 1978: 52).

Consequently, when designing a policy for defence, Nehru seemed keen to ensure three basic conditions. First, the armed services and the threat of militarism had to be kept in check. Second, given the nature of the relationship between defence and foreign policy, the attainment of self-sufficiency in defence production coupled with independence from the superpowers became two important criteria. Third, over the course of the nation-building programme, expenditure on defence should not reduce significantly the resources available for investment.

### *The Blackett report*

In practice, however, it seems that Nehru lacked the expertise to translate his broad policy aims into a strategy for long-term

military building in general and arms procurement in particular. In addition, there existed gaping holes in the decision making process. It was only during the Second World War that Indian Civil Service (ICS) officers were deputed into South Block.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it took a long while to change the Department of Defence into anything more than a post office—prior to independence all decisions were ultimately taken in Whitehall and defence expenditure was non-voted. Immediately after partition, when the Defence Department became the Ministry of Defence, the ICS was faced with a bureaucratic vacuum as permanent regulations became outmoded in practice because they had always been framed with reference to British authority (Venkateswaran 1967: 115, 117). Moreover, many British officers remained after partition to help with the transition of power and authority and many proved extremely unwilling to respect and take notice of defence ministry bureaucrats.<sup>4</sup> What all this amounted to was a process of confusion and partial breakdown.

As a part of the process of redress, Nehru sought the advice of an British expert, P.M.S. Blackett. Nehru asked Blackett to prepare a report outlining the measures necessary for India to become near self-sufficient in defence production over a period of approximately seven years. During the second half of 1948, Blackett assessed India's economic, industrial and technological capability in a geopolitical framework. The result was a short report submitted to the Indian defence minister, in which Blackett attempted a study of how India could 'best cut her defence coat according to her scientific, financial and industrial cloth' (Blackett 1948: 1).

In 1948 India's per capita income totalled less than one-tenth that of the United Kingdom and industrial production was a mere 2 per cent of the same. Blackett endorsed the need for self-sufficiency but he framed his recommendations in the context of available resources. The Blackett Report followed an earlier report by another British adviser, Dr Wansborough Jones, who had previously submitted a paper on the scientific and organizational measures required to make India a self-supporting defence entity.<sup>5</sup> The paper was commissioned by the Interim Government prior to independence in 1947 and

formed the basis for defence science organization in India. In this report Wansborough Jones outlined four central roles for the Indian armed forces. First, to secure the land frontier against raids from border tribes or from attack by a second-class army. Second, to support civil power; this role was later dropped and tactfully ignored by Blackett. Third, to provide a small expeditionary force capable of protecting India's regional interests. Fourth, to develop a force capable of taking the field in a first-class war; yet, this had to be achieved from available financial resources. With the exception of the second element Blackett followed these guidelines.

From the outset Blackett worked from the assumption that India was a new nation which wished to stand unaided in defence issues. This was in direct contrast to a previous, pre-1947 conception held by Britain that India would look towards the Commonwealth of Nations for protection in the event of hostilities, particularly in relation to naval assistance. Blackett realized that defence policy had not yet acquired either a traditional pattern or entrenched bureaucratic interests, which would make policy shifts very difficult once final decisions became increasingly characterized by bureaucratic-political criteria. Ample opportunity existed for an innovative approach to both defence doctrine and policy. Above all, Blackett advised the Indian government not to prepare to fight a Third World War, which he considered both irrelevant and impossible anyway. India's defence needs were primarily related to threats from the northwest. Technical planning for a small-scale war was the fundamental requirement, although this did not eliminate conceptualizing for a more sophisticated defence profile in the future.

Blackett's starting point for his defence plan was India's extreme economic weakness. On this basis he outlined the choices open to the government. In order to become self-sufficient a strong economy and industrial base was essential. The import of sophisticated defence equipment would drain foreign exchange reserves and slow the rise in national income through industrialization and improved agriculture, upon which any future rise in military expenditure would itself be based. In fact,

Blackett recommended initial *reductions* in defence expenditure to encourage growth in other sectors.

In relation to choice of technology Blackett recognized the inevitability of foreign imports but suggested a strategy for minimizing the impact of defence imports on foreign exchange reserves. He proposed the bifurcation of procurement into *competitive* and *non-competitive* weapons. In so doing he kept in mind India's likely enemies and chose to ignore major power intervention on the understanding that such a scenario would inevitably draw in other major powers, which would to some degree protect India's interests. Moreover, even if India was in possession of extremely advanced military equipment it would unlikely be quantitatively sufficient to offer many independent options against a major power given the posture India could afford in the foreseeable future.

Competitive weapons were characterized as the type of front-line weapons platforms which relied upon state-of-the-art technology for optimum performance during engagement with enemy forces—fighter aircraft, heavy tanks, an aircraft carrier task force, for example. Non-competitive weapons were those which were used in roles which did not require optimum military performance characteristics in order to be effective, such as small arms, field guns, motor transport and night bombers. Both the USA and Britain possessed large *matériel* stockpiles following the end of the Second World War. If India bought up some of these surplus stocks, if it avoided where possible high performance weapons and chose instead low performance weapons in non-competitive areas, and, further, linked defence planning to relevant scenarios, a measure of self-sufficiency was possible in the future.

If surplus weapons were available Blackett saw only three reasons for importing new and improved models. First, when the weapon was highly competitive. Second, if a non-competitive weapon system offered a markedly improved performance over its predecessor, so as to justify the capital cost by reducing running and maintenance costs. Third, to supply training schools with single models to keep the services in touch with modern developments. Furthermore, Blackett argued that self-sufficiency would create freedom of choice in foreign policy

rather than strategic isolation. Although Blackett did not place particular stress upon this observation, it was in fact of immense importance because therein lay the link between a preferred, affordable and independent defence policy and posture, as outlined by Nehru, and the policy of non-alignment.

With regard to the composition of the three services, Blackett made a series of specific recommendations. Wisely, he paid considerable attention to the *missions* of the armed services as well as the type of equipment each should be seeking.

The Indian navy was ascribed three central missions. First, to protect coastal shipping against mining, submarines, surface and airborne attack; coupled with the capability to respond in kind. Second, to escort and protect a small number of ocean convoys between Aden (now Yemen) and Singapore but no further; merchant shipping was always going to be a valuable national asset for India and important for the development of trade. Third, to co-operate with the army and air force in repelling enemy landing operations and advances along coastlines, and to be able to undertake similar operations against the enemy. Given the general principles from which he was working, Blackett argued that the acquisition of cruisers was inadvisable due to a combination of cost and vulnerability; the deep draught of a cruiser renders it vulnerable to mines and submarines. With the exception of convoy protection, the advice was invariably the same—opt for small, cost-effective and non-prestigious systems for the central missions and generally. Surprisingly, in view of the costs involved, the acquisition of a small escort carrier for convoy protection was recommended and justified on the basis of having greater utility than the cumbersome cruiser. However, Blackett also pointed out that such a mission was far too expensive for India at that time and, moreover, that Pakistan would be unlikely to acquire the type of bombers with the range and capability required to attack convoys in the foreseeable future.

In his discussion of the future of the Indian air force (IAF), Blackett's recommendations were much more guarded. First, he ruled out a long-range bombing role on the basis of cost and efficacy. Blackett was also highly opposed to strategic bombing on humanitarian grounds, following the destruction of German

cities by the allies during the last stages of the Second World War (Zuckerman 1982: 111). In particular, he argued that India could not hope to acquire a precision bombing capability, so any long range bombing mission would have to be countervalue strikes directed against civilian population centres. Apart from the unlikely military gain, such action might lead to a campaign of mutual destruction, even without nuclear weapons,

In view of the high density of India's own cities and the impossibility of affording an adequate defence against enemy air attacks, it would seem a great mistake for India to initiate such a campaign of mutual destruction, and probably even a mistake to retaliate in kind even if so attacked (Blackett 1948: 12).

Where India could profit was through the acquisition of smaller, single-engined, fighter-bombers which would not need fighter escort and would offer an adequate if not an optimum strike capability. Blackett was also unconvinced that the IAF required jet fighters. Apart from the need to evaluate carefully the suitability of, for example, *Vampires* and *Meteors* for the arid and semi-arid conditions of northwest India, due to problems of dust and high ambient temperatures, jet fighters were also too fast to offer joint army-air force target identification missions. Nevertheless, Blackett endorsed fully the procurement of night fighters, photo-reconnaissance aircraft and trainers, and he recommended a major boost to the Hindustan Aircraft Factory at the earliest possible moment.

Blackett's report was much less comprehensive on the future role of the Indian army, perhaps because he agreed with others that the army had to be controlled and reined. However, he did highlight the potential for a relatively rapid progress towards self-sufficiency which would be made less difficult by the prior existence of ordnance factories established by the British. In addition, the army was the best possible candidate for the exploitation of non-competitive equipment. The only specific recommendation was for the development of highly trained anti-aircraft units to protect airfields, factories and other key targets.

Finally, Blackett considered the role and organization of defence science in India. This contribution was perhaps the most relevant in the report, particularly in relation to self-suffi-

ciency. First, Blackett dismissed India's potential for developing an indigenous capability in the more advanced fields of defence technology, such as chemical and biological warfare, high performance aircraft, guided missiles, atomic warfare, millimetric radar and large ship design. Instead, the preferred route towards self-sufficiency should be in increasing the efficiency of weapons systems which were both tried and tested and familiar to both the armed forces and defence scientists. Thus, both servicemen and scientists could usefully collaborate on radar tracking, interception, bombing accuracy and air attacks on ships. Equally, the scientific community should be given the space and resources to nurture a research and development capability that was both relevant to India and kept abreast of developments elsewhere by covering in detail the open literature on defence science and technology. This called for a considerable increase in funding, sound organization under the Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and carefully controlled collaboration between the government, the armed forces and the science community. Indeed, Blackett received enthusiastic advice from Homi Bhabha and S.S. Bhatnagar who later sat on the Defence Science Policy Board and Professor D.S. Kothari, the first Scientific Adviser to the MoD (Venkateswaran 1967: 281).

The Blackett Report appeared to be accepted by the policy makers of the day. In February 1949 Blackett received a letter from the incumbent Defence Secretary, H.M. Patel, the virtual creator of the Indian MoD, which read,

I am glad, however, to be able to inform you that *the Government have accepted your report practically in its entirety*. The only important point of difference related to your recommendations for the Navy, but the difference is not, to my mind, one of great substance (Patel 1949; emphasis added).

Despite Patel's comments to Blackett and the realistic and affordable policy options offered to India, Blackett's recommendations were either ignored or very poorly implemented. Thereafter, Blackett's contribution to science and technology in India came only in the form of proposals to reorganize the National Physics Laboratory, the task for which he is most well-remembered (Vishvanathan 1985). He is also remembered for

his enthusiastic endorsement of the Indian nuclear energy programme.<sup>6</sup> However, according to one former decision maker, Blackett moved from defence to non-military science policy primarily because he considered his efforts in the defence sector to have been a failure, whereas he certainly had more success in more orthodox science policy.<sup>7</sup>

Inevitably, Blackett did encounter opposition within India, particularly from the armed forces, which is understandable and predictable considering his recommendations concerning non-competitive equipment, economic and industrial development before defence, indigenous production and reductions in defence expenditure, although he was not without his supporters. In effect, Blackett was attempting to downgrade the relative importance of the armed forces in favour of economic growth and his report left all three armed services with the need to protect both their existing turf and their future interests. Furthermore, all or most of the advice he gave cut against the grain of military professional interests which had been so successfully transferred from Britain to India but which, after 1947, required a prince's purse from a pauperized polity. His private papers provide the signs that his attempts to rationalize defence policy met with stiff resistance from the service chiefs,

At my first meeting with the Defence Minister, I asked, as a starting point for my thinking . . . to be told the military plans of the three armed forces. . . . The next day the Service chiefs produced their future plans. It only needed a short perusal of these documents to see that the total proposed packages of the three services nearly reached the total Indian Central Budget (Blackett Papers G-29: 3).

Elsewhere in his papers there is a transcript of an interview given in Delhi in which Blackett reiterated his reservations about the recommendations of the service chiefs,

I usually managed to speak to the Joint Chiefs of Staff meeting. But I am not of any official status in defence matters. I found it very interesting and I think it was useful getting to know a country which has got independence. You got certain advice from the old British advisors, which may or may not suit the occasion. Then there was very dangerous advice, it was hard to get objective advice and I had a lot to do. . . . I think I saved India a lot of money by discouraging her from some of the wilder ideas that the Chiefs of Staff had when I went there. . . . I once



wrote a paper which was read, I was told, by new ministers coming in for the next ten years (Blackett Papers G-12: 2-3).

Despite the 'wild' advice of the chiefs of staff, the Indian Cabinet did indeed take a decision in 1949 to adopt a narrow and circumspect defence policy based upon the assumption that, in the event of a war, Pakistan would have the initiative in launching an attack on Kashmir. In such a situation the Indian army divisions in Kashmir would attempt to hold the attacking forces whilst the rest of the Indian army advanced towards Lahore and Sialkot. A decisive defeat of the Pakistan army, coupled with the occupation of Lahore, was considered sufficient to bring Pakistan to the negotiating table. At the diplomatic level, the Indian government would work to prevent Pakistan from receiving war credits from external powers, which would enable it to continue fighting the war. If these efforts failed to halt the war, the Government would mobilize international support for a negotiated settlement (Kavic 1967: 37). No moves were made to make anything more than a token defence in the North East Frontier Agency against a potential threat from China—the diplomatic process was considered sufficient. However, it also occurred to Nehru that the logic of accepting that an exceptional threat from China existed would have demanded a very much more expensive defence policy.<sup>8</sup> In principle, therefore, early defence policy was the result of Nehru's attempts to contain defence expenditure and find a reasonable fit between India's defence and foreign policies.

Without doubt, the Blackett Report was a document of exceptional insight which could have been particularly useful to Indian defence policy makers and may even have had some influence upon early policy formation; discussion on the report certainly took place in the Defence Committee of the Cabinet.<sup>9</sup> Without losing sight of the central problem of defence, Blackett offered India a means to relative security which contained four important ingredients. First, the report emphasized the need for self-sufficiency. Second, the defence policy proposed was consistent with the foreign policy of non-alignment. Third, it would have been relatively cheap to implement. Fourth, the armed services would have been controlled, both politically and fiscally.

The policy adopted in 1949 was also encouraging. Indian policy makers appeared to recognize that India was unable to fight anything like a major war, and they adopted instead a policy that was both sensible and affordable. Furthermore, through the stress upon negotiation and the exploitation of international opinion, there was a conscious attempt to link defence policy to foreign policy.

Nevertheless, it is axiomatic that policies do not succeed on paper alone; they require successful implementation. Although Nehru may have intended to restrain the role of the military and cap defence expenditure, it is by no means clear that he succeeded. Nor is it clear that Nehru fully came to terms with the implications of the principles he valued. There is little disagreement as to the general direction of *declared* defence policy between 1947 and 1962. However, so far there has been no real attempt to investigate whether or not the Indian government attempted to implement the policy described above, or succeeded in so doing if such an attempt was made. In order to understand this more clearly it is necessary to look closely at India's defence policy in practice, namely, the import and production of weapons systems based upon the defence missions which evolved during the 1947-62 period.

### *The Indian army*

As a result of the policy adopted soon after the attainment of independence, the Indian army maintained its position as the focal point of defence. During this period over 75 per cent of the defence budget was allocated to the army but, at the same time, equipment modernization was perfunctory due to the government's unwillingness to expend limited foreign exchange reserves, which were stretched to the limit to pay for the modernization of the other two services and for non-military requirements. Also, much of the army budget was given over to pay and pensions, which always account for a large proportion of the Indian army's annual budget on account of the country's tradition of maintaining an extremely large standing army. Consequently, until 1962 the army could only allocate less than

50 per cent of its budget to capital expenditure (Thomas 1978: 147, Table 4).

In 1950 Nehru reduced the size of the army by 50,000 men to approximately 300,000 in a bid to make economies and to simultaneously transform the army into a more mechanized rather than an infantry force (Kavic 1967: 84–85). Nevertheless, despite the apparent wish for mechanization, army procurement during this period was relatively insignificant in terms of major weapons systems, but quite comprehensive in terms of stores and ammunition, which allowed adequate stockpiling for defence but not modernization.

Given India's limited resources, the evolution of defence policy and posture should certainly have favoured the army. At independence the country possessed a well-organized and professional army, by far the senior service. By contrast, the navy and air force were both much smaller and younger. Under British rule, their roles were insignificant, particularly that of the navy. In addition, there was a natural fit between what the army could provide, what decision-makers felt they wanted from defence, the resources available for defence, and current threat perceptions. Without any serious change in organization the army could provide a defence against Pakistan based initially upon a relatively cheap and labour intensive form of security. Increasing the material strength of the army would not require excessive imports or major structural changes to the composition of the armed forces. However, against this must be set the political objections and fears to increasing the strength of the army.

Between 1947 and 1958 India made little effort to acquire modern infantry weapons but the emphasis changed in 1958 when Krishna Menon took over the defence portfolio. The army retained in service the mortars, artillery and howitzers from the Second World War and, for many years after 1947, the Enfield .303 rifle, a weapon of First World War vintage (SIPRI 1971: 475). However, towards the late 1950s, after the scale of US military aid to Pakistan became evident, tank procurement increased, the most notable acquisition being the purchase of over 200 *Centurion* tanks from Britain between 1956 and 1957.

The somewhat mediocre fortunes of the army should also be seen against the backdrop of three significant constitutional and governmental changes by which the Indian government sought to limit the army's power and authority. First, on the very first day of independence, the separate post of Commander-in-Chief was abolished and the title was given to the President of India, which transformed it into a largely ceremonial post. Ostensibly, this was to promote balance between the three services, but the move was also intended to minimize a possible challenge to civilian authority from the army. Second, the Ministry of Defence became civil service dominated and thereafter expanded its capacity to control information and make decisions on military matters, although successes appear to have been minimal.<sup>10</sup> Third, for several years after independence the government gradually changed the Warrant of Precedence, which substantially reduced the army's prestige and its pay and further emphasized the principle and practice of civilian control (Cohen 1971: 171–73).

### *The Indian air force*

The 1949 policy guidelines adopted by the Cabinet dictated that the army become the pivotal service, with the air force and navy ascribed little more than a supporting role. However, between 1948 and 1956, the Indian air force received, by any standards, sufficient hardware to constitute an *independent* build-up, far beyond the role of support alone. Starting with 100 *Spitfires* and *Tempests* in 1948, the IAF took delivery of an unspecified number of De Havilland *Vampire* F.3 fighters in late 1948, 52 *Vampire* F.B.9s and *Vampire* N.F.54s in 1949–50 and 71 French Dassault MD-450 *Ouragan* fighter-bombers in 1953–54.<sup>11</sup> Following a decision in principle on 1 April 1956 to procure the English Electric *Canberra*, ten months later the government ordered 54 B(1).58 light bombers, eight P.R.57 photo-reconnaissance aircraft and six T.4 dual-control trainers. Deliveries began in the early summer of 1957. The inventory of *Canberras* was further increased by 20–30 units in 1961–62. In mid 1955, the Government was considering the purchase of 80 Dassault *Mystère* IVA interceptors or the licensed production of the

British *Folland-Gnat*. At a later date the Government placed orders for another 33 Dassault *Ouragans*, superseded its earlier *Ouragans* with 110 *Mystères* and extended negotiations with Folland for the *Gnat*, which eventually went into production. As the IAF was taking delivery of these French aircraft in mid 1957, and HAL was beginning production of the *Gnat* in Bangalore, the Government ordered 160 Hawker *Hunter* Mk.56 FGAs (ground attack fighters) and 22 Mk.66 trainers from Britain (Kavic 1967: 102–4).

These procurement details seem to reflect a departure from the policy adopted in 1949 in which the Cabinet essentially committed India to a defence policy based upon a strong army and relatively little else. Nor is it possible to detect much of Blackett's influence here either. What too of the Government's intention to procure new aircraft equipment at the slowest rate possible?<sup>12</sup> To all intents and purposes, the IAF became henceforth an independent service with a role that exceeded support. By the late 1950s the IAF, through the procurement of the *Canberra*, had a strategic bombing role vis-à-vis Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, with regard to *Vampires*, all the models procured by the IAF had only recently entered service with the RAF in Britain. For example, the *Vampire* F.3, a tropicalized version of the F.B.5, was developed by Britain for deployment in the Far East. Although India purchased the system between 1949 and 1950, it did not enter RAF service in the Far East until January 1952. Much the same is true of the *Canberra* (see Table 1). Furthermore, the relative capability of the *Canberra* should not be overlooked. In its time it was considered a remarkable aircraft, capable of extremely high altitudes and, during the period in question, it was a very advanced weapons system.

The rate of aircraft procurement either represents an astounding institutional victory for the IAF throughout the 1950s, or a significant policy change on the part of the Government during the implementation process. Certainly, procurement details suggest that neither Blackett's recommendations nor the policy guidelines adopted in 1949 were followed with any great enthusiasm, even though the practical problems associated with competitive and non-competitive weapons are most pronounced in the field of aeronautics, which

was in a rapid state of evolution during this period. The fact remains that the air force managed to ensure that all or most of the weapons systems it required were forthcoming even before the ascendancy of Krishna Menon, the Defence Minister renowned for his support of the IAF. So too did the expansion precede the consolidation of the US-Pakistan military aid agreement, even though Indian intelligence sources may have anticipated such an agreement several years earlier. IAF procurement signified, therefore, a widening gap between public defence policy and actual defence posture.

### *The Indian navy*

At independence the Indian navy was a meagre force comprising thirty-two obsolete vessels primarily intended for coastal patrol, including four sloops, two frigates, one corvette and twelve minesweepers—nothing of any great worth (Larus 1978: 1). In addition, the British had tended to recruit primarily Punjabi Muslims into the lower ranks of the Navy, who went to Pakistan in 1947. This left India with a very small number of ratings after partition (Kathari 1982: 62).

Initially, Britain attempted to persuade India to build up a navy which could integrate itself into a larger force based upon the Commonwealth navies. However, Indian decision makers were adamant that India should control a strong and independent navy commensurate with the country's size, the long coastline, geopolitical location and potential wealth. As a result, the Indian government laid down plans for a *strategic* role for the Indian navy after 1947. In response to a government directive in late 1947, before Blackett arrived on the scene, the Indian Naval Headquarters drew up a ten year plan of naval expansion under the direction of Vice-Admiral Parry, seconded from the Royal Navy. The proposed programme envisaged the development of a carrier force comprising two light fleet aircraft carriers, three light cruisers, eight to nine destroyers and the necessary support vessels (Kavic 1967: 117). If implemented this programme would have represented a quantum increase in naval capability.

Table 1 Selected Indian air force and Royal Air Force procurement 1946-1961

Make/Model	RAF front-line service/squadron service <sup>a</sup>	Withdrawn RAF	Procured IAF
Tempest IV (tropical version?)	December 1946	March 1950	1948
Vampire F-3	FL service-April 1947; sq. service-1948; Cyprus-1949	1952	April 1948
Vampire F.B9 (tropical versions of F.35 in service from 1949-50)	FL service-Nov 1951 (Malta)	FL service-1956 (remained in 2nd line until 1960-61)	1949/50
Vampire NF.54 (export version of NF.10 <sup>b</sup> )	July 1951	1954	IAF received 15 units in 1957-59
Canberra B(1)-58 <sup>c</sup> (export version of B(1).8)	May 1961 (Germany)	June 1972	July 1955-late-1956 <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> For training purposes the date of squadron service if about six months later than the date of front-line services.

<sup>b</sup> The NF-24 was a private venture intended for the export market. An arms export ban in 1950-51 prevented the sale of NF-24s to Egypt. Instead the units were taken by the RAF as an interim measure due to production delays on other versions of night fighter.

<sup>c</sup> A central mission for the B(1).8 was low level nuclear strike.

<sup>d</sup> One Canberra was exported to India directly from the first production batch, the thirteenth from an initial batch of thirty. Between August 1956 and September 1958, sixteen units reached India directly, the bulk arriving in late 1956.

Source: Armament and Disarmament Information Unit resource base, Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex, U.K.

Table 2 Military Expenditure and Procurement of Sophisticated Armament in India and Pakistan, 1948-1962

	India Mil Ex <sup>a</sup>	Pakistan Mil Ex <sup>b</sup>	Indian Air Force	Pakistan Air Force	Indian Army	Pakistan Army	Indian Navy	Pakistan Navy
1948			100 Spitfire & Tempest (fighters) ? de Havilland Vampires F3 (fighters)					
1949			52 Vampires F.B9 & NF-54 (fighter)	10 Sea Fury (fighter)			3 "R" class destroyers	
1950								
1951	2501.0000			36 Vickers Attacker (bomber)				1'O' class destroyer
1952	2054.0000							
1953	2138.0000		71 MD-450 Ouragan (fighter bomber)					3 "Hunt" Class Escort destroyer
					180/30 Sherman M-4			

Table 2 (Continued)

	India Mil Ex <sup>a</sup>	Pakistan Mil Ex <sup>b</sup>	Indian Air Force	Pakistan Air Force	Indian Army	Pakistan Army	Indian Navy	Pakistan Navy
1954	2168.0000		10 Vampire NF-54 (fighter bomber)	? M-24 Chaffee 200 M-4 Sherman 50 M41 Bulldog				
1955	2137.0000							
US Aid in Pakistan commences								
1956	2321.0000		50 Vampire T.55 8 Seahawk (fighter)	120 NA F-86 (fighter)	210 Centurion			2 'Battle' class destroyers 1 'Dido' class light cruiser
1957	2832.0000		182 Hawker Hunter F.56 & T.66 (fighter) 33 MD450 Ouragan		40 AMX-13		1 'Colony' class cruiser	
1958	3106.0000	952.0000	74 Canberra B (1) 58 & PR 57 (bombers/ recce)	32 Martin Canberra B-57/B & RB-57		460 M-47 & M-48 Patton <sup>c</sup>	1 'Leopard' class anti- aircraft frigate	4 CV & CH class destroyers
1959	3065.0000	1063.0000	110 Mystere IVA (interceptor)					
1960	3225.0000	1210.0000	100 Folland Gnat (fighter)			M-113	2 'Whitney' Class Anti- submarine frigate	1 'Majestic' class aircraft carrier
1961	3545.0000	1208.0000						
1962			14 F-104A & F-104B Star- fighter (fighter)					

a Fiscal year starts 1st April

b Fiscal year starts 1st July

c Delivered between 1955 and 1960

Sources: Kavic (1967) SIPRI Worksheets

The expansion programme commenced in 1948 and within two years a light cruiser and three 'R'-class destroyers had been purchased from Britain. A Directorate of Naval Aviation was also formed in 1948 with a remit to develop plans for a fleet air arm. The procurement of two aircraft carriers from Britain was planned for 1955 and 1957, by which time India would also have obtained 300 modern naval fighters, fighter-bombers and anti-submarine aircraft. In the event, the ambitious scope of this programme was severely affected by the uncertain market conditions stemming from the Korean War, the formation of NATO and the ensuing rise in domestic demand amongst the major defence exporters: In particular, the British were unable to commit themselves to a sales package of this magnitude. Duly, the Indian government reconsidered the naval programme and concluded that it was beyond the country's means, irrespective of supply shortfalls. Nevertheless, new plans for a small carrier force were drawn up in 1949 and revealed in January 1950. The scheme was marginally revised in 1953 resulting in decisions to purchase a fleet replenishment vessel from Italy and to borrow three ex-escort destroyers of the Hunt Type-2 class from Britain. In addition, a light cruiser and two inshore minesweepers were also purchased from Britain in 1954 and 1955.

As part of the expansion plan, a six-year naval programme was revealed in 1955 with the purchased vessels to be built in British shipyards. Actual procurement was cut back significantly due to a foreign exchange shortage in 1957-58 following a balance of payments crisis which amounted to deficits which reached US \$650 million. However, the financial crisis did not prevent the purchase of the British light fleet carrier *Hercules* in 1957 and its modernization in Belfast or the purchase of *Sea Hawks* and *Alizes* aircraft for the fleet air arm. The carrier, renamed the *INS Vikrant*, was bought from Britain in January 1957, commissioned in March 1961 and received its full complement of naval-aircraft five months later (Kavic 1967: 116-25).

In the case of the Indian navy the situation is relatively clear. Both government and the services intended India to have a blue water navy with an ability to operate in the ocean reaches to the

south, east and west. However, a lack of foreign exchange coupled with the non-availability of British vessels for purchase prevented the immediate attainment of such a capability. Because of financial stringency, the navy had to be the first casualty despite Blackett's recommendations for significant expansion; the bottom line on defence policy was an adequate land-air based defence against Pakistan, and the naval role in such a posture was limited. In the event of a war with Pakistan the navy was responsible for bottling up the Pakistan navy in Karachi harbour and to a lesser extent at Chittagong.

It is therefore somewhat misleading to describe the navy as India's 'forgotten service' (Larus 1978), even though it received very small budgetary allocations during this period—a mere 4.7 per cent of the total defence budget and 13.3 per cent of capital expenditure, even in the 1962-63 budget (both the army and air force received over 40 per cent of capital expenditure, which was under 10 per cent of the entire defence budget) (Thomas 1978: 147, Table 4). The reason for this apparent 'forgetfulness' was that India could always have turned to Britain in the event of a pronounced security threat from the Indian Ocean. During this period the Indian Ocean was still a 'British lake'—Britain had not yet withdrawn from East of Suez and links between the two countries were, as they are now, cordial.

#### *Actors and institutions: the dynamics of defence policy*

The evolution of defence policy in the years following the attainment of independence is so confusing as to 'beg the question as to whether there was any policy at all. From the information available and presented here it would appear that Nehru's well-documented wish to restrain defence expenditures was ignored, both directly and indirectly, despite the 1949 policy directives which came from the cabinet. The resources committed to the Indian army were broadly in line with Nehru's defence policy and also the recommendations of Blackett. However, the arrangements made for the other two services, notably the speed and scale of procurement, connote the adoption of far-reaching missions, even given the need to increase the strength of both to balance that of the army. This

suggests that either Nehru had much less control over defence policy than is generally accepted or, alternatively, that under pressure from the service chiefs he willingly acquiesced to what amounted to a significant deviation from declared policy.

Although the allocations to the navy were low during the first two decades of independence, there was a firm intention on the part of the key decision makers to build up a strong naval presence in the Indian Ocean. It is clear that the naval programme was restrained through necessity rather than choice; the Indian economy was not growing at a particularly rapid rate during the period in question. But for the domestic foreign exchange crisis and the contraction of supply on account of the Korean War, the naval programme could well have been more dynamic. Even so, the acquisition of an aircraft carrier, light cruisers and a fleet air arm less than fifteen years after independence amounts to something considerably different to neglect.

The development of the Indian air force is even more at variance with declared policy. According to the government's policy guidelines adopted in 1949 and not changed subsequently, the task of the air force was primarily to support the army in the event of a land war against Pakistan (Thomas 1978: 176). However, the procurement of defence equipment suggests otherwise. The *Canberra* and the *Hunter*, for example, had little to do with either supporting the army or countering the acquisitions of Pakistan, even after the signing of the 1954 military assistance pact with the United States; either they were designed for missions which were not included in declared policy or they appear to have been purchased for national prestige (SIPRI 1971: 475). Furthermore, the air force may have been used primarily to support the army during the 1965 war, but it is important to differentiate between the complete spectrum of activities and options at the disposal of an armed service and its activities in a specific conflict.

With both the Indian navy and the air force it is as important to understand their institutional development in terms of missions, rather than to look exclusively at procurement and expenditure. In particular, the deliberate or almost casual development of both a blue water navy and a strategic bombing

mission imply that both the air force and the navy fared much better in their institutional development than is traditionally assumed. Once missions have been established they are relinquished or reversed with extreme reluctance; they invariably reflect or reinforce either key tenets of foreign policy, major perceptions of threat or institutional interests, both military and civilian. Furthermore, once a mission has been established it must be followed by procurement. Otherwise, by definition, a country is not adequately defended.

It is difficult to define with documented precision the contours of decision making and bureaucratic infighting which during this period led to the departure from declared policy. This is due in large part to the considerable amount of secrecy which surrounds issues relating to defence within India and the unusually small number of actors involved—for a decade Nehru and Menon had primary control over both defence and foreign affairs; the defence portfolio was invariably given to junior ranking cabinet ministers and was not considered a prestigious post and several of the incumbents had difficulty in asserting their independence. Cabinet debate on key issues was lacking and, as Cabinet Secretary, H.M. Patel found it extremely difficult to inject smoothness and cohesion into the decision making process.<sup>14</sup> This was in part due to Nehru's style of government but also because of the closed nature of the debate, compounded by both legislative and bureaucratic ignorance.

From an examination of the rate of procurement by the Indian armed forces and the abiding sense of equivocation which emerges when defence policy during the period in question is placed under the microscope, it appears that the received wisdom is significantly misinformed. Much of the evidence and many of the relevant policy moves have been misread: India did not proceed along a defence path characterized by policy restraint nor does it seem that defence policy was sufficiently well linked at the conceptual level to foreign policy, witness the fate of Blackett's recommendations. The armed forces may have been demoted in relation to their civilian peers but, when resources permitted, they received the equipment they wanted.

How then can this period be understood? The evidence points persuasively if not conclusively to a defence policy which drifted rather than evolved. However, whilst it is probably incorrect to ascribe to one particular explanation there are four possible ways to read the evolution of India's defence policy between 1947 and 1962.

The first explanation is that the decision making process tilted in favour of the long term ambitions of the Indian élites. They believed that India was destined to become a nation of considerable power and influence in both South Asia and the Indian Ocean. This influenced the defence thinking of those who made and implemented policy from the outset and caused them to lay the foundations for a blue water navy and a land-air strength of impressive proportions, encouraged undoubtedly by high ranking military officers. The continuing ambiguity of policy on nuclear weapons, both before and since independence, reflects well the duality of defence policy, as does the rate of naval and air force procurement after 1947. In particular, the procurement of both an aircraft carrier task force and strategic bomber squadrons indicate that defence policy reflected a more ambitious and comprehensive defence posture than Nehru had led both the Indian nation and the rest of the world to believe. Thus, in tandem with other influential policy and opinion shapers, Nehru, the international statesman, Gandhian and democratic socialist, may have harboured a very different agenda for his country from the one he publicly avowed.

The second possibility is that Nehru may not have understood or recognized the growing drift in defence policy. It is well known that Nehru was impatient with policy detail even though he exercised considerable control over the foreign and defence portfolios—he neither knew much about defence nor took much interest, in part because of a pious disinterest.<sup>15</sup> His excessive workload, the overall diversity of the problems he elected to confront—international, regional and domestic—may have permitted a situation in which a dissimilar defence policy could emerge. However, there is no evidence that Nehru's ministers and gatekeepers were in any way disloyal.

Nor is there any evidence to suggest that the professional bureaucrats in the MoD were intent on subverting the policy laid down by Nehru. Blackett appeared not to find antagonism to Nehru's directive amongst the members of the MoD he encountered; to the contrary he appeared to strike a warm rapport with characters such as H.M. Patel and D.S. Kothari, judging by his correspondence. Obversely, the service chiefs were less enamoured with the attitudes of the bureaucrats, witness the complaints of the first Chief of the Navy Staff,

. . . wise counsel . . . helped me to exercise restraint in periods of frustration. These frustrations arose chiefly from the bureaucratic machinery. Bureaucrats fall into two categories. There were those who knew all about everything, including operational and technical matters, and those particularly of the Finance Ministry, who did not seem to care what harm they did to the service so long as they saved money for the exchequer. There was a third neuter group whose effective contribution was minimal. The basic fault lay in the system of functioning of the ministry whose officials played no part in the initial formulation of plans, thus depriving themselves of the opportunity to appreciate both the professional considerations and requirements as well as financial and practical limitations that are involved in any proposal. They preferred to remain the ultimate arbiter (Kathari 1982: 63).

A third possibility is that the three Chiefs of Staff were the key to the yawning gap between formulated policy and its implementation. The Chiefs of Staff's opposition to the Blackett approach has already been considered. Is it possible that the authority of these actors extended to redefining the policy of Nehru, the key architect of defence policy? Here it is necessary to consider the way in which policy decisions were formulated between 1947 and 1962.

Immediately after independence a number of committees were set up to advise the government and the defence minister on defence problems, particularly in relation to Pakistan. The Defence Committee comprised the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, Foreign Minister, the Finance Minister and other important government ministers. On all the other committees designed to underpin the Defence Committee of the Cabinet sat members of the armed forces ranging from the Chiefs of Staff (Defence Minister's Committee, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Joint Planning Committee) to the Directors of Intelligence



of the three services and the representatives of the Chiefs of Staff (Rao 1970: 307–8). Consequently, at the formal decision-making level, the Chiefs of Staff constituted a ubiquitous presence either directly or by proxy. In practice, Nehru would have been constantly bombarded during policy planning sessions by the views of the service chiefs, many of whom were contemptuous of the views of bureaucrats. Moreover, not only were non-military views in the minority but, because of poor technical and operational knowledge, they were probably less persuasive as well,

In the opinion of H.M. Patel, a former Defence Secretary, the policy organization of the Defence Ministry was 'sufficiently flexible to ensure that every relevant point of view has a chance of being presented at appropriate level if necessary'. The theory is rarely if ever translated in practice, however . . . the ability of the average civilian official to make such decisions . . . must be judged against Patel's own admission that the ignorance of civilian officials (to which may properly be added that of the politicians) is so complete as to be a self-evident and incontrovertible fact (Rao 1967: 217).

Before independence, the commander-in-chief was also the War Member on the governor-general's Executive Council. Because of this, all proposals requiring decisions were sent first to the Military Finance Department. If the proposal was accepted the file was sent to the Defence Department for implementation. Under this system, the armed forces took whatever decisions they could and saw no need to consult the Defence Department.

Obviously, this situation was clearly untenable after 1947, particularly as the three service chiefs were under the control of the Defence Minister and Ministry and both needed to know a great deal about what was going on. In 1949, over the course of the defence review, new rules governing decision making were brought in. Thus, a list of the most important areas of decision making was drawn up and the Service Headquarters were instructed to send anything relating to this list to the MoD in the first instance. The Ministry would then examine the request from all the relevant angles and any differences of opinion were taken up in meetings.

Nevertheless, although the MoD slowly built for itself a base of expertise and knowledge, it could not acquire the required skills quickly enough to confront the armed forces on equal

terms. Moreover, in 1958 Krishna Menon reversed the new procedures and gave the power of decision making back to the service chiefs. Thus, at the Secretariat level, the MoD became, or remained, little more than a post office and the ministry itself became a much less attractive area of the bureaucracy in which to work (Venkateswaran 1984).

The initial system of decision making was set up by Lord Ismay, an adviser to Mountbatten. However, over time the formal committee structure disintegrated: the Defence Committee, the Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Intelligence Committee were effectively telescoped into one and decisions were increasingly considered on an ad hoc basis by the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, the Chief of Army Staff and some senior army officers (Rao 1970: 309). For example, in January 1948, prior to leaving for Washington to take up the task of advising Sir Gopalaswamy Ayyangar, the leader of the Indian delegation to the UN Security Council concerned with the Kashmir dispute, B.M. Kaul, then a low-ranking military officer, was called to Nehru's residence. Referring to a recent discussion between Air Vice-Marshal Mukerji and himself, Nehru asked Kaul to explore the possibility of purchasing the Mitchell bomber whilst in the US. Kaul did so but his request was eventually turned down primarily because of the unorthodox approach, but also because of the failure of the Indian government to inform either the US State Department or the British government as the customary supplier of defence equipment to India (Kaul 1967: 97–98). In another more serious incident Krishna Menon worked through friends and personal contacts to secure a bulk sale of disposal stocks of jeeps and engendered at the same time a great deal of parliamentary disapproval which contributed significantly to his departure.<sup>16</sup> Such informal methods of decision making would have further excluded non-military decision makers.

It is also necessary to consider the possibility that the level of military ignorance on the part of both government and bureaucracy may have allowed the armed forces to get their way through incremental changes. It is true that only the armed forces were able to link defence policy to technological needs, by virtue of the ubiquitous ignorance that existed elsewhere.

However, the notion that the armed forces conspired against their civilian counterparts for enhanced allocations or unnecessary equipment contradicts all that is known about both sides. Moreover, Nehru was the shrewdest of politicians and it is extremely unlikely that his political instinct would have permitted defence policy to develop in a direction which he did not approve. Finally, the nature of the ad hoc policy-making machinery described above suggests that the army would have fared much better if it had not enjoyed undue influence during this era. The logical conclusion is that the increased strength of the armed forces came about with Nehru's approval, tacit or otherwise.

Fourth, it is conceivable that defence policy went through several redefinitions as a result of the strained relations with Pakistan over Kashmir and, in addition, the establishment of a bilateral economic and military aid agreement between the United States and Pakistan. Despite Nehru's attempt to isolate his country from the impact of the Cold War and the inevitable domestic consequences, he was unsuccessful for reasons over which he had little or no control.

During the early 1950s the United States pursued a collective security policy based upon the creation of an interlocking series of alliances designed to hem in the Soviet Union and prevent communist expansionism. Pakistan became a member of the Baghdad Pact in September 1955 and later that year joined SEATO. Although talk of arms transfers had been in the air for several years, when the agreement was struck Pakistan concentrated upon using the aid to create a multi-service capability to resist external attack, from India in particular (SIPRI 1971: 494). Consequently, the government of Pakistan paid special attention to the development of the Pakistan air force through the acquisition of the F-86 *Sabre*, the B-57 *Canberra* and the F-104, equipped with *Sidewinder* air-to-air missiles. The army received heavy artillery, *Patton* and M-24, M-4 and M-41 tanks.

Nevertheless, there are four important points to recognize concerning the effect upon India of US aid to Pakistan. First, although it did have an impact upon India's security perspective, the latter's defence policy and posture were not fundamentally altered. India's rearmament programme was well in

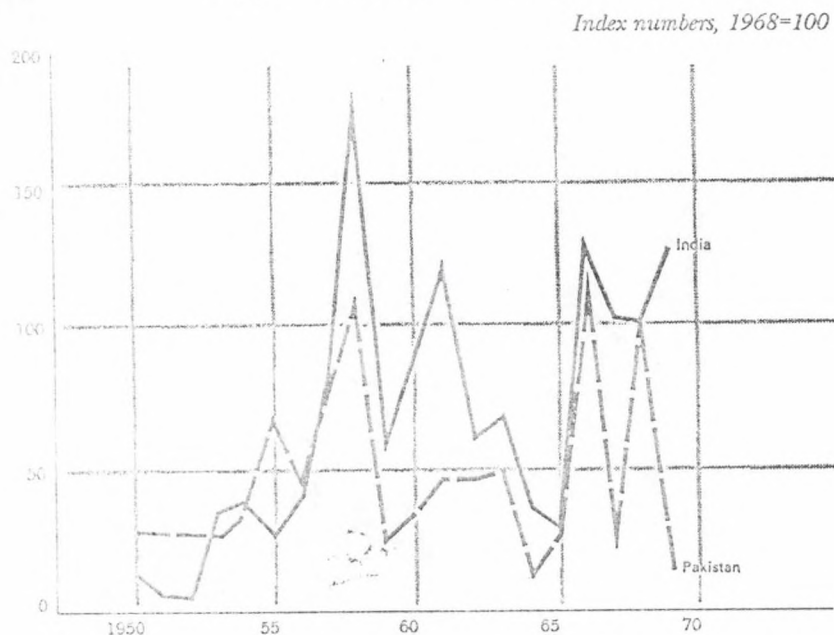
motion before the mid 1950s, and the argument that there was an 'action-reaction' process which compelled India to change its defence policy has been overstated. Second, the 'action-reaction' cycle can act both ways, and it is more likely that Pakistan's decision to seek military and economic aid was a reaction to the erosion of its firepower capability vis-à-vis India. As Table 2 and Figure 1 indicate, India appears to have been intent on seeking a significant advantage well before the aid agreement was signed. Many but not all of the acquisitions which arrived after 1955 were both planned and/or ordered well before. Moreover, although the records are both poor and patchy, it would seem that India consistently outspent Pakistan on defence by an approximate factor of three. Third, despite reservations about India's non-aligned foreign policy, the United States also provided small quantities of defence equipment to India in the mid 1950s.

If during this period there was a distinct gap between India's declared defence policy and its actual posture, this would suggest that India should have been spending considerable quantities of precious foreign exchange on defence, particularly as India received virtually no military aid during this period. However, in absolute terms and as a proportion of GNP, defence expenditure was low, although the defence burden as a percentage of central government expenditure was high; in 1950 the government allocated 29 per cent of current expenditure to defence (Kavic 1967: Appendix I). The costs in terms of foreign exchange have been estimated at approximately US \$50 million in 1950, rising to \$210 million in 1959 (Terhal 1982: Table II).

However, in the immediate post-war period, India did not need to draw on its foreign exchange reserves, as it obtained most of its defence equipment from Britain. It was able to pay for much of its defence equipment by drawing heavily on the sterling balances representing the debts incurred by Britain during the Second World War when many of the latter's costs in India were paid in rupees. This was an extremely useful situation for India as the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, recognized when he alluded to the dilemma it posed for Britain in a memorandum circulated to his cabinet,

It must be remembered that these two countries [India and Pakistan] may go to War with one another and that is the only object for which they seek arms. Unfair balance was shown to India in the arrangements made at the time of partition and the balance might be slightly redressed in favour of Pakistan. On the other hand we place ourselves in a very questionable position of arming both sides with no other object than long-term advantages of keeping up the United Kingdom manufacturing potentials. For instance, forty-two bombers for Pakistan raises the query 'who are they going to bomb?' Obviously the cities of India. This involves us in serious responsibility. We are like an arms merchant supplying both sides in a possibly impending struggle. There is of course this difference that we do not get paid anything. All that happens is that the amounts are marked off the so-called 'sterling balances'. . . . A refusal to continue supplies would not prevent them from obtaining at any rate some of their requirements from elsewhere. This would almost certainly be from outside the sterling area and would thus impose a further strain on the foreign currency reserves of the sterling area as a whole (Churchill 1949).

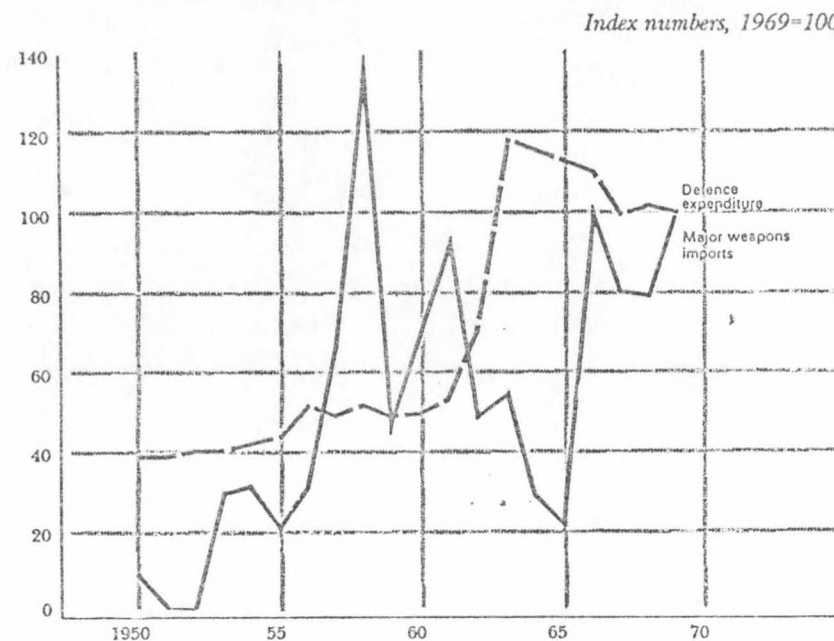
Figure 1 Comparison of the Rise and Fall in Major Weapon Supplies to India and Pakistan<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Total major weapon imports to India in the period 1950–69 were \$2,000 million. Total major weapon imports to Pakistan in the period were \$500 million.

Source: SIPRI 1971, Chart 16.2, p. 472.

Figure 2 Comparison of the Rise and Fall in Major Weapon Supplies and Defence Expenditure in India<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Total Indian defence expenditure in the period 1950–69 was \$16,355 million (at 1960 prices and exchange rates). Total major weapon imports were \$2,007 million.

Source: SIPRI 1971, Chart 16.3, p. 473.

Thus, the real cost of growth in the defence sector was largely hidden. In addition, the Indian government also used the sterling balances to pay pensions to retired service personnel resident in the United Kingdom.<sup>17</sup> The gap between procurement and expenditure is further borne out by Figure 2. As procurement increased dramatically between 1956 and 1957 defence expenditure remained relatively constant and did not rise significantly until after the Sino-Indian War of 1962.

### Conclusion

Based upon the evidence, it is possible to conclude that India had embarked upon a significant defence build-up well before

Both the establishment of the US–Pakistan military aid programme and the 1962 war. The background to this policy can be examined from three angles.<sup>18</sup>

First, it is inconceivable that Nehru was completely unaware of the defence build-up. More likely the duality of defence policy during this period stems in part from, or was facilitated by, the inherent contradiction between Nehru the idealist, international statesman, pacifist/Gandhian and democratic socialist, and Nehru the realist and leader of a large, newly-independent country with the potential for real international power and significance. Although by instinct Nehru preferred to use political power and diplomacy rather than force, he and others may also have realized that a shallow defence capability would severely compromise India's future greatness. In addition, many of the hopes for regional stability were disappointed, and from the 'First Round' onwards India sought at least to match and in the event greatly exceed the military capability of Pakistan. Yet, at the same time, Nehru had to be seen to be placing maximum emphasis upon economic and social development, which ruled out expenditures and investments for future international power. The confused defence policy which emerged was a tortuous attempt to find a fit between the present and the future, the domestic and the foreign, and the regional and international influences bearing upon the Prime Minister, who himself was torn between idealist aims and realist instincts.

Second, the role of the armed forces should not be underestimated. Although they were weakened in relative terms after 1947 they still apparently managed to score many institutional successes. This was in part because they controlled the monopoly over the information and knowledge required to link policy, strategy and technology. It was also because of their steadfast refusal to break conceptually with the Sandhurst legacy; as soldiers schooled in the British tradition they clung tenaciously to the European/Western way of defence despite the costs and dependency which such a process entailed. Or, put another way, they were clever enough to offer no attempt to assist Nehru with the design of a defence policy which would have reflected the key tenets of non-alignment and would have

built upon the ideas put forward by Blackett. They just ignored the contradictions between actual and declared policy and readily accepted the considerable rewards of a confused defence policy.

Finally, despite Nehru's best intentions, policy making and implementation were a ramshackle process. Although the need to deter further threats from Pakistan in Kashmir was accepted by all concerned, the lack of debate, discussion and clear thinking resulted in a confused policy based upon a covert acceptance of realism on the one hand, and the occasional genuflection to idealism on the other. Nehru may have been too preoccupied to orchestrate and follow through a debate amongst experts, while the armed forces stuck rigidly to their traditionalist views, which eventually prevailed. As it became clear that procurement reflected a slow and moderate growth towards eventual great power status, with all the attendant regional and economic ramifications, the armed forces were content to profit from the drift which others were ill-equipped to halt. Thus, although all agreed that the country had to purchase enough to retain an edge over Pakistan, only the armed forces could differentiate precisely between adequacy and excess. As with other countries the 'how much is enough' problem proved to be an insoluble dilemma for policy makers because the policy process never squarely investigated, debated or rationalized the moves required to deter both Pakistan and to retain the key tenets of Nehru's idealism.

## Notes

- 1 The INA was formed in 1941 when captured Indian soldiers drawn from defeated units of the British Indian army in the Southeast Asian theatre were organized by the Japanese invading forces into an army which would fight alongside Japan for the 'liberation' of India. Subhas Chandra Bose revived the INA in 1943, to great effect.
- 2 India is often if not always thought to be one example of a developing country where the military is content not to intervene in the political process. However, in the late 1950s and early 1960s commentators on India and Pakistan, such as Hugh Tinker, were suggesting that if public order in India degenerated as it had done in Pakistan the army might intervene, given that it was the real power behind the state administration. The confidence shown towards the Indian military as an apolitical force is more recent.
- 3 H.M. Patel, conversations with the author, Vidyanagar, Gujarat, 14 May 1991.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 The Blackett Report on defence should not be confused with a later report he compiled on the National Physics Laboratory.
- 6 H.M. Patel, conversations with the author, Vidyanagar, Gujarat, 14 May 1991.
- 7 NagChaudhri, conversations with the author, Delhi, 15 October 1984.
- 8 I am grateful to Lorne Kavic for this insight. Conversations with the author, Vancouver, 26 July 1988.
- 9 H.M. Patel, conversations with the author, Vidyanagar, Gujarat, 14 May 1991.
- 10 The civilian control of the MoD also harks back to the famous dispute between Kitchener and Curzon in the nineteenth century.
- 11 When matched against Pakistani procurement prior to the aid agreement with the US, the acquisition of the *Ouragan* may seem profligate, particularly so many units. However, correspondence between high ranking members of the British Air Ministry in 1952 provides a possible explanation:

I am led to believe that the Indian Air Force will do its best to convince their government that the French product is the better bet. Behind their conviction is the thought that the *Ouragan* can be made readily available to them in the numbers they require, and also the desire not to place all their orders for aircraft in a single country. . . . The Indians are of course looking for their 'top cover'. They are quite happy with the *Vampires* as ground attack aircraft and also as day interceptors of piston engined opposition, but they are also conscious of the unbalanced nature of this fighter force and want an aeroplane that can tackle a really high level opponent whether he be a bomber or a top screen. *As they spend most of their time looking over the fence at Pakistan, I would imagine they are not thinking in terms of any very large numbers, but have perhaps heard of UK offers of the Canberra to Pakistan.* (Public Records Office, London, Ref: 371/1011211 110720; emphasis added).

- 12 H.M. Patel, conversations with the author, Vidyanagar, Gujarat, 14 May 1991.
- 13 Although the rate of technological change over the past three decades makes comparison difficult, it was the equivalent of India purchasing the Tornado Multi-Role Combat Aircraft in 1983.
- 14 H.M. Patel, conversations with the author, Vidyanagar, Gujarat, 14 May 1991.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 I am grateful to Lorne Kavic for his comments on this part of the analysis. Conversations with the author, Vancouver, 26 July 1988.

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