Evolution of India's Strategic Culture: Role of Rimcollians

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ABSTRACT

How do attitudes towards use of force in wars, counter-insurgency operations and strategic policy/decision making contribute towards making of strategic culture of nation-states? What has been India's experience in this regard? And, how have Rimcollians contributed to the making of India's strategic culture? The Centenary in 2022 of one of India's premier institutions, the Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC), provides an ideal occasion to engage with these questions. In many ways, the setting up of the RIMC itself was the result of grand strategic thinking. The nationalist leadership insisted on creation of a "cradle for leadership" for Indian officers who would be inducted into the British Indian Armed Forces in return for India's contributions in the First World War. These Indian officers gained useful operational experience in the run-up to and during the Second World War. Following India's independence, they contributed significantly to strategic thinking and decision-making in diverse strategic settings including wars, insurgencies, border settlements, out of area contingencies, operations short of war and post-conflict negotiations. This chapter looks at these strategic events from a political scientist's perspective, as distinct from a military historian's view, to identify some of the enduring traits of India's approach to use of military force that have become part of India's strategic culture. It emerges from the narrative that the role of Rimcollians in shaping India's strategic culture and influencing strategic policy/decision making has been both substantial and enduring.

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INTRODUCTION

Strategy making owes its origins to matters connected with military command, especially the art of generalship including the employment of limited means (or resources) to achieve the ends (goals or objectives) identified by leaders in military engagements. Given this inextricable link between strategy and war, it is only axiomatic that any study of strategic culture must also take into account a nation's preferred means of conducting armed conflict and use of force to achieve goals of national security and development. But what is strategic culture? Why is it important to study strategic culture in the Indian context? And, what has been the role of Rimcollians in the evolution of India's strategic culture?

Strategic culture of a nation is the product of a number of factors including its history, formative experiences as a modern nation-state, geography, philosophical texts, organizational cultures of strategic policy making structures, political economy, attitudes towards use of force and thinking of the national security decision-makers of the time. These ideational influences get further crystallized into enduring traits based on actual experience in different strategic settings including nation-building, economic decision making, foreign policy making, border settlements, use of military force in wars and domestic insurgencies, out of area operations, conflict resolution techniques and conduct of operations short of war.

India, an ancient civilization but a young nation, has rich sources of strategic culture rooted in its past. It also has a distinct and diverse military history based on its experience in Independent India's wars, operations short of war and counter-insurgency operations. However, it is surprising that existing studies on India's strategic culture have not adequately included attitudes towards use of force in such strategic settings while identifying the key elements of India's strategic culture.

From the perspective of a political scientist, this omission is intriguing. It leads to two sets of problems. First, while definitions of strategic culture identify attitudes towards use of force as a key element, in practice experience in wars, insurgencies and other military operations have not been adequately addressed in the narrative. Second, even when attitudes towards use of force are dealt with in a generic manner, the findings of empirical analysis of strategic decision-making in wars and evolution of counter-insurgency strategies do not get reflected in the conclusions about India's strategic culture.

In this chapter, an attempt is being made to 'rescue' strategic culture studies from some of these shortcomings to get more meaningful insights into India's strategic culture. The Centenary in 2022 of one of India's most prestigious temples of learning, the Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC), provides an ideal occasion to engage with this subject for several reasons. First, the RIMC, created in 1922, provided the first batches of Indian officers to the British Indian Army. Second, the training imbibed by them and military experience gained in the formative years of the institution were to prove decisive in creation of a professional and apolitical military after 1947. Third, Rimcollians have played a seminal role at every critical phase in the evolution of attitudes towards use of force in furtherance of India's national security objectives in the post-independence period. Therefore, mapping these experiences and evolution in thinking is critical to get a holistic understanding of India's strategic culture.

It emerges from this study that the evolution of India's strategic culture and the coming of age of RIMC over the last 100 years neatly overlap into four phases of a quarter-century each. This can hardly be brushed aside as a mere coincidence. The formative experiences following the creation of RIMC in 1922 and the role of Rimcollians in strategic decision-making at critical turning points in Independent India's wars, domestic insurgencies and other military operations forms the basis for identifying the enduring traits of India's attitudes towards use of force that have become part of India's strategic culture.

The article is, accordingly, organized into the following sections:

(1) Formative Experiences and "Sharpening the Saw" (1922-1947)

(2) Conventional Wars and Countering Insurgencies (1947-1972)

(3) Operations Short of War (1972-1997)

(4) Creating Punitive Options in a Nuclearized Environment (1997- 2022)

DEFINITION OF STRATEGIC CULTURE FOR THIS STUDY

For the purposes of this study, the definitions of strategic culture put forward by several authors were analysed (Booth 1990: 121; Johnston 1995: 46, 49; Gray 1999: 131,133, 144; Longhurst 2004: 17-18, 48). These are summarised in the table below:

Table 1: Definitions of Strategic Culture

	Booth (1990: 121)	**Johnston** (1995: 46, 49)	**Gray** (1999:131,133,144)	**Longhurst** (2004:17-18, 48)
Definition of Strategic Culture	"A nations traditions, attitudes, patterns of behaviour … and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force"	"An integrated system of symbols which acts to establish long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of role and efficacy of military force …	"The persisting socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions, … and preferred methods … specific to a particular geographically based security community that has had a unique historical experience"	"A distinctive body of beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding the use of force, which are held by a collective (usually a nation) and arise gradually over time, through a unique protracted historical process"
Scope for Change in Strategic Culture	"Outlasts all but major changes in military technology, domestic arrangements or the international environment"	"Its evolution (and dissolution) over time can be traced as long as successive generations of decision-makers are socialised and share the basic precepts of the strategic culture"	"Can change over time, as new experience is absorbed, coded, and culturally translated"	"Not permanent or static … It is shaped and influenced by formative periods and can alter, either fundamentally or piecemeal, at critical junctures in the collective's experiences"

Impact of Strategic Culture	"Helps shape (but not determine) behaviour on issues such as use of force in international politics, sensitivity to external dangers, … and strategic doctrine"	"Limits in some ways the options considered" [but this cannot be assumed – it must be demonstrated by measuring actions against a falsifiable theory]	"Finds expression in distinctively patterned styles of strategic behaviour" … "Is a guide to action"	"Embodied or reflected in the observable 'regulatory practices' of policy"

Source: Adapted from Sondhaus (2006: 124-125)

These definitions highlight the need to take into account attitudes towards use of force as sources of strategic culture. They provide useful insights about the likely impact of strategic culture and cater for the fact that strategic culture may change over time. Based on the above, the following definition of strategic culture emerged as the most useful framework for analyzing evolution of India's strategic culture and the role of Rimcollians:

> *A set of collective enduring traits, attitudes and preferences regarding the use of military force held by a nation that are shaped by national traditions, cultural beliefs, historical experience, and, strategic orientation of its decision-makers.*

FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES AND "SHARPENING THE SAW" (1922-1947)

In many ways, the end of the First World War was a watershed moment for the Indian nationalist movement. The chapters by two erudite Rimcollians, Jasbir Khurana and K.S. Thimayya, in the Platinum Jubilee volume *Where Gallantry is Tradition* (Sidharth Mishra & Bikram Singh Eds. 1997: 7-23, 83-100) beautifully lay out the circumstances following the War that led to the creation of RIMC. These two chapters clearly bring out elements of shrewd strategic thinking by the nationalist leadership to push home the point that "Indians now felt politically adult" and wanted a larger role in charting their own destiny in political, bureaucratic and military leadership roles.

In essence, the British had been weakened following the long war, the supply of British officers had "exhausted" and Indian nationalist leaders were clamoring for

Indianization of the officer cadre of the British Indian Army in return for the sacrifices of over 1.2 million soldiers in the First World War. This coincided with efforts on their part to ensure self-government and delegation of financial and legislative powers to Indians. Under relentless pressure and fear of resentment and turmoil, the British agreed to enlarge recruitment of Indians into the civil services and the military in officer-level billets. The creation of the Military Requirements Committee under Lord Rawlinson in 1921 paved the way for the formal creation of the Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College (PWRIMC) on 13 March 1922 at the old campus of its predecessor institution – the Imperial Cadet Corps (also known as "Rajwara Camp").

During the formative years from 1922-1947, the first batches of Indian military officers inculcated qualities of leadership, communal harmony, religious tolerance and reverence for teachers in what the Prince of Wales described as the Indian tradition of "*Guru"* and *"Chela*". Under the careful watch of Pandit Bala Dutt, Granthi Arjun Singh, Moulvi Niaz Ahmed, religious teacher Oaudi Badri Narayan, and others the cadets were taught values of respect for all religions. Rimcollians like K.S. Thimayya, N.S. Bhagat and Inayatullah Hassan (Mishra & Singh Eds. 1997: 92, 103 & 119) provide vivid details of how "intelligently handled" religious training where cadets were "invited to all places of worship" created a "truly secular atmosphere" and understanding of all religions. This tradition was continued in later years, most prominently during the Golden Jubilee celebrations of creation of RIMC in 1972. On this momentous occasion, priests read passages from the Gita, Bible, Quran and the Guru Granth Sahib at the presentation of the Martyr's Memorial on 13 March 1972. This was done in the presence of three Rimcollian Army Commanders (K.P. Candeth, G.G. Bewoor and P.S. Bhagat), who had recently conducted the successful 1971 War with Pakistan that led to liberation of Bangladesh.

This formative experience of respect for all religions was to hold the Indian Armed Forces in good stead in subsequent years as they developed the ability to operate with soldiers from different communal backgrounds and geographical terrains. Following independence, there was a concerted effort on the part of the leadership to further diversify the recruitment pool of Indian soldiers to ensure pan-India representation. Steven Wilkinson in his book *Army and Nation* (Wilkinson 2015) examines how India was able to set right the imbalance in its composition from a narrow geographical base and make it more representative of the demographic mix in the country.

This strategic cultural trait led to institutionalization of cultural customs and traditions in Indian regiments that ensure a mix of soldiers and officers from different religions and

backgrounds to instill a sense of unity in diversity. One of the popular traditions is the MMG (Mandir, Masjid, Gurudwara) Parade in the Jammu & Kashmir Rifles, where the Moulvi, Granthi and Pandit perform the religious functions or rituals of the other religions. Such parades of gratitude and prayers were a regular feature at RIMC in its formative years where "temple bells, Azan of Moulvi Sahib and Shabads by 'Bhaiji' could be heard from different corners" in pre-independence period (Rajinder Singh in Mishra & Singh Eds. 1997: 187-88). During subsequent raisings in the Indian Army after independence including the Brigade of Guards, the Mahar Regiment and even the Rashtriya Rifles, aspects of unity in diversity were given due importance and consideration. In fact, this is a strategic cultural attribute that is firmly embedded in DNA of the Indian Armed Forces. Therefore, it is reasonably common to hear of a 'Thambi' as Colonel of the Sikh Regiment, a 'Khalsa' General from Madras Regiment or a Syrian Christian fully conversant with the customs of the Garhwal Regiment and the local language too. This cultural assimilation extends even to the other organizations that are part of the Executive in India. The steel frame that provides the continuity is therefore very strong.

The enormous significance of this strategic cultural trait becomes evident only when it is juxtaposed with either the Pakistan Army or the Chinese armed forces. Pakistan was not able to diversify its recruitment base or harmonize a multi-ethnic, multi-religious mix in its armed forces. This has led to a Punjabi Sunni/Barelvi Muslim or Pathan dominated identity in the armed forces as well as the extensive use of religion to reinforce Pakistan's strategic culture (Lambah 2016). The results have, therefore, been sub-optimal for Pakistan. China also remains a Han dominated society and military. This is likely to lead to its own complications in future years.

Another advantage that Rimcollians have enjoyed is that most of the Commandants and Teachers at RIMC, both pre- and post-Independence were either accomplished sportspersons or had good military bearing (N.S. Bhagat in Mishra & Singh Eds. 1997: 104-105). Some of the names that come to mind include Col. Haughton, Mr. J.C. Scott, Mr. H. Catchpole, Mr. Badham, Mr. R.C. Sharma, Capt. D. Chowdhury, Capt. R.S. Khatri and the never-say-die Mr. Ahlawat. These *Gurus* have been instrumental in inculcating the spirit of sportsmanship, tenacity, team spirit, values and sense of fairness on the "playing fields" and drill squares of RIMC. It would be no exaggeration to say that this contributed in a significant manner not only to character building but also the military successes that were achieved in scores of military operations undertaken by Rimcollians in succeeding years.

Two other enduring qualities that were inculcated by Rimcollians in the "sharpening

the saw" phase from 1922-1947 are noteworthy. The first experience of Rimcollians is probably unparalleled among modern armed forces anywhere in the world. It is little known that Rimcollians fought valiantly on different sides after several Indian armed forces officers were inducted into the Indian National Army (INA) of Subhash Chandra Bose after the fall of Malaya in 1942. This created dilemmas in the minds of both Rimcollians fighting in the British Indian Army and in the INA. K.S. Thimayya and Hira Lal Atal were among Rimcollians who approached Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru and others after doubts emerged in their minds about fighting with the British against their brethren. However, they were encouraged to continue to fight the War as it would help them gain useful operational experience that would hold India in good stead after Independence. Brigadier N.S. Bhagat, the elder brother of Lt. Gen. P.S. Bhagat, Inayatullah Hassan and Taj Mohd. Khanzada are all proud of their association with the INA. They emphasize the sterling role played by INA in India's independence movement and provide excellent account of dilemmas faced by Rimcollians who joined INA (N.S. Bhagat, Hassan, Khanzada et. al. in Mishra & Singh Eds. 1997: 110-115, 116-119, 201-202).

What makes this experience even more unique is the fact that post-independence the Indian political and military leadership was able to successfully reconcile these insurmountable contradictions after the trials of INA officers at Red Fort. Rimcollians who joined the INA went on to play significant roles in the political and military firmament of Independent India**.** Shah Nawaz Khan, a general in the INA, joined the Indian National Congress and served as a Minister for several years. J.R. Bhonsale was appointed Minister of Rehabilitation after partition and later was a Member of Lok Sabha. Brigadier N.S. Bhagat, Colonel Niranjan Gill and several others re-joined the Indian Army, though after losing some seniority and pay. This experience definitely inculcated qualities of flexibility, the ability to deal with paradoxes and seemingly contradictory approaches, which emerged as a strategic cultural trait in Independent India's political, military and economic development.

Second, Rimcollians gained very useful operational experience in the Second World War. Several officers won gallantry awards and displayed tenacity and innovativeness under trying conditions. The stories of gallantry of K.S. Thimayya (DSO), P.S. Bhagat (Victoria Cross), Nand Lal Kapur (Military Cross and batchmate of Maj. Som Nath Sharma), Taj Mohd. Khanzada (DSO, Military Cross and Bar) and several others are well known. K.S. Thimayya was also the senior most Rimcollian at the time of Independence. As a battalion commander in the Arakan campaign in the Second World War, and later as a Brigadier at the time of Independence, he had first hand exposure to higher direction of war. This operational experience was to pay rich dividends in India's post-independence military history.

CONVENTIONAL WARS AND DOMESTIC INSURGENCIES (1947-1972)

The second phase of evolution of India's strategic culture following Independence from 1947-1972 is marked by several experiences that laid the foundation for an apolitical and professional military. During this period, the political and military leadership faced varied challenges including wars and domestic insurgencies. Several strategies were evolved during the fledgling years to deal with these challenges. They formed the basis for developing attitudes towards the use of force that are uniquely Indian. Rimcollians have been integral to this process.

One of the most striking features of the Indian military is its apolitical ethos. In 1948, in an address at RIMC, Lord Louis Mountbatten advised young cadets to "never mix politics with soldiering" and "serve the country and service, not yourself". *Gurus* at the RIMC like R.C. Singhal, Hugh Catchpole, E.J. Watson, Din Dayal, S.P. Sharma and other Masters witnessed this speech (Singhal in Mishra & Singh Eds. 1997: 25). It is, therefore, no surprise that in later years Rimcollians like K.S. Thimayya and P.S. Bhagat discouraged discussions on politics and "going to court" culture for redressing grievances among military officers. They also continuously reassured the political leadership that the military had no intention of dabbling in politics (Defence Watch 2013, StratPost 2012)[1].

In stark contrast to India, weak Pakistani civilian leaders relied on the Pakistan Army to retain control and silence the voices in provinces. Pakistan Army's involvement in internal affairs combined with projection of threat from India led to institutionalization of its role in internal politics (Haqqani 2018 and Ahmad 2019: 72-73). In essence, Pakistan slipped into what Samuel Huntington describes as "subjective civilian control", whereby professionalism of the Army reduces because it is co-opted by civilian politicians. India, on the other hand, retained "objective civilian control", where the military retains its professionalism because of firm civilian control (Huntington 1957). This is an important aspect that is central to nation-building experiences in India and Pakistan. It is also central to the discussions in this chapter because the trajectory of civil-military relations impacts attitudes towards use of force and thereby strategic culture.

Following Independence, Rimcollians also contributed significantly towards war fighting and military professionalism. K.S. Thimayya had already left his indelible imprint at

1 These references relating to Defence Watch, a programme on T.V. on strategic issues anchored by senior Rimcollian Maj. Gen. Ashok Mehta, and an interview of Ms. Ashali Varma, daughter of Lt. Gen. P.S. Bhagat VC and author of the book "Victoria Cross: A Love Story", provides excellent insights into the views, intellectual acumen and legacy of Lt. Gen. P.S. Bhagat. These videos are a must watch for the GenNext of Rimcollians.

the global stage representing India as Brigade Commander of 268 Infantry Brigade that was part of British Commonwealth Force in Japan after the Second World War. He impartially oversaw the surrender of Japanese forces in Singapore and Philippines, a fact acknowledged by both the victors and losers. Following independence, Thimayya as the Head of the Boundary Force and G.G. Bewoor as the Secretary of the Army Partition Committee, ensured transfer of populations and determined the Regiments/Battalions, equipment, weapons and personnel that would be distributed between India and Pakistan. Major P.S. Bhagat served in the Punjab Boundary Force to maintain law and order following Partition. Colonel G.G. Bewoor was the founder Director of National Cadet Corps (NCC) in 1948. Later in the mid-1950s, Major General Virendra Singh was at the helm of NCC. Many generations of Rimcollians and their families have benefited from their association with General Virendra Singh, a former President of the Rimcollian Old Boys Association (ROBA). These formative experiences were to influence several enduring traits that impacted evolution of India's strategic culture in subsequent years.

Rimcollians helped shape attitudes towards use of force in all military engagements with Pakistan during the 1947-72 period. Major Som Nath Sharma set the highest standards of bravery in the early phases of the Battle for Srinagar. He was Independent India's first Param Vir Chakra (PVC) and has guided generations of soldiers by making the supreme sacrifice. Several important military innovations were undertaken under the command of Maj. Gen. K.S. Thimayya, who was a Divisional Commander in J&K in 1947-48 War. The bold induction of Stuart MK-VI tanks of 7 Light Cavalry at Zojila Pass helped break the impasse and recapture Dras and Kargil. The audacious air landings at Poonch (8 December 1947) and at Leh (24 May 1948), maintaining supply lines to Poonch by creating an air bridge and the subsequent lifting of the year-long siege of Poonch drew on past experience gained in Kohima-Imphal sector during the Second World War. Leading from the front that has emerged as a strategic cultural trait among the officer cadre of the Indian Armed Forces was a hallmark of Thimayya. He was at the head of advancing Army tank columns in Zojila and was in the aircraft flown by Air Commodore 'Baba' Mehar Singh that landed at Leh airport for the first time on 24 May 1948.

Thimayya is also reported to have devised the Thimayya Plan to liberate the part of J&K that had been captured by Pakistan. Though this plan could not be implemented because of the ceasefire, these war time memories were to impact subsequent Indian plans to take back territory during the 1965 war with Pakistan. The capture of strategic locations in Hajipir bulge and Kishenganga bulge in the J&K sector in 1965 was not only designed to ease military pressure in the vulnerable Chamb-Jaurian sector but was also designed to "complete

the unfinished agenda" of the 1947-48 war.

It is, therefore, not surprising that when another Rimcollian Lt. Gen. Kashmir Singh Katoch was at the helm of 15 Corps in the 1965 war, India took up some of the unfinished tasks of the 1947-48 war. These included operations involving capture of strategic heights in Kargil and the Hajipir Pass. General Katoch was awarded a *Padma Bhushan* following the war. Some of the strategic cultural preferences that emerged from the 1965 conflict included capture of territory for post-conflict negotiations, identifying war aims early in the conflict and strict adherence to war aims and post-conflict diplomatic goals.

Lt. Gen. K.P. Candeth who had cut his teeth as GOC 17 Infantry Division in the successful liberation of Goa, Daman & Diu from Portuguese rule in 1961 served as Deputy Chief of Army Staff during the 1965 War. He was an important part of the strategic decision making both during the war and in post-conflict negotiations. Lt. Gen. M.A. Zaki, a Rimcollian from an illustrious Hyderabad family, was awarded a Vir Chakra in the Battle of Thatti Jaimal Singh in 1965 in the Lahore Sector. He was to later to play an important role in strategic decision making and influencing attitudes towards use of force in the early stages of the insurgency in J&K between 1989-1995. Air Marshal Vinod Patney commissioned in the Indian Air Force in 1961 was also awarded a Vir Chakra in the 1965 War. In fact, Air Marshal Patney has the distinction of taking part in three wars in 1965, 1971 and 1999 where Air Force was used. He witnessed how air power was employed in different roles in diverse settings and in innovative ways.

As one of India's leading military historians and eminent Rimcollian AVM Arjun Subramaniam points out, the Air Force was not used in offensive role in 1962 (it was used only for reconnaissance and airlift purposes). Though it was used more effectively in 1965 it could not pro-actively "shape the battlefield". However, in 1971 it was used in both strategic airlift and offensive roles (Subramaniam 2016 & 2020). The strategic cultural traits that emerge from the experience in wars during the decade of 1962-72 was the ability to use air power in a progressively offensive manner, calibrated escalation through counter-offensives, ability to take on more advance fighter aircrafts of the opposition, and, display of raw courage.

During the 1971 War with Pakistan, three Rimcollians were Army Commanders - Lt. Gen. K.P. Candeth, Lt. Gen. P.S. Bhagat and Lt. Gen. G.G. Bewoor, two of whom were awarded the *Padma Bhushan*. This was a fitting tribute to the contribution of RIMC in nation-building just prior to its Golden Jubilee in 1972. In many ways, the 1971 war was a turning point in evolution of India's attitudes towards use of force. First, jointness was put to good use. It operated at two levels – among the three armed forces, between armed forces and

politicians and between armed forces and other elements of civilian establishment including civil servants and civilian security/intelligence agencies. Second, use of psychological operations, covert operations and exposing the atrocities of the adversary to shape public opinion locally and internationally was an important feature of this war. Third, there were several examples of progression in the use of force and learning as compared to previous wars. Some important features that bear highlighting include:

- Several structures like the Committee on East Pakistan, Provisional Government of Bangladesh and mechanisms for organized training of Mukti Bahini were created early in the conflict. In essence, there was more politico-military coordination in this war (Gokhale 2019).

- The leadership took its time to carry out detailed preparations before intervening. The ability to carry out a multi-directional attack in the East, effective management of the China threat and sealing a Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union to safeguard India's interests were big success stories that emerged because of this.

- Military leaders also showed offensive intent in all domains – sea, air, and land. The actions of 20 Squadron of the Air Force in the Western Sector, the airlift across the Meghna river in the East, tank battles at Basantar and Longewala, naval attacks on Karachi and Chittagong, and the use of well rehearsed air and land warfare tactics based on experiences in the 1965 war stood out as significant progressions in attitudes towards use of force.

The war in the Eastern Sector involved classical Joint Theatre Level Operations in which the Army, Navy and Air Force worked in close coordination. One of the most decisive operations in the Eastern Theatre involved the "crossing the mighty Meghna river" that set the stage for the offensive towards the new Centre of Gravity - Dacca, the capital of East Pakistan. This was one of the most audacious Joint Army-Air Force operations that took the enemy by surprise and "un-nerved" the top leadership. The Navy played a classical role of naval blockage in the Bay of Bengal including naval air strikes against land and sea targets. The key role of 4 Guards in the Battle of Meghna and the subsequent assault on Dacca was acknowledged by none other than the legendary Corps Commander of 4 Corps Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh. One of the Rimcollians in 4 Guards, Major Chandrakant Singh, a Military Historian of repute, was part of these operations and was awarded a Vir Chakra. He has been at the forefront of shedding light on both the strategic and operational dimensions of these operations. He also writes on other interesting issues of strategic and military significance and is a walking encyclopedia on India's military history including the role of RIMC/Rimcollians.

One of the lesser known facets of the Naval war was the heroic actions by a Rimcollian Lt. Cdr. Rajat K. Sen, the Logistics Officer on board the INS Khukri, which was commanded by the legendary Capt. Mahendra Nath Mulla. The ship sank in the Arabian Sea on 9 December 1971 after it was hit by a torpedo but not before Lt. Cdr. Sen, Captain Mulla and 176 sailors and 18 officers made the supreme sacrifice in the highest traditions of the Indian Navy. Lt. Cdr. Sen continued to help the sailors stuck in the lower decks of the ship despite knowing that their chances of survival were diminishing. This set very high standards of courage and leadership, which will be very hard to replicate.

Rimcollians were also at the forefront of evolution of attitudes towards use of force with China during the 1947-72 phase. The only problem was that their advice was not fully heeded. General K.S. Thimayya got first hand exposure to handling Chinese PLA troops when he was nominated as the Chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC), which monitored the repatriation of over 150,000 Prisoners of War, mostly Chinese and North Koreans after the UN-sponsored Korean Armistice in 1953 that brought the Korean War to an end (Subramaniam 2016). According to AVM Subramaniam, it was on India's prodding the Chairman Mao of China agreed to come to the negotiating table with the US to end the Korean War (Subramaniam 2020: 314).

Given this experience it would have been axiomatic that the most professional advice on attitudes and capabilities of Chinese troops could come only from Rimcollians like General K.S. Thimayya, who was appointed the Army Chief in 1957. Another Rimcollian Brig P.S. Bhagat, the Director of Military Intelligence, also completed a thorough assessment of Chinese Army's threat to India as early as August 1959. His recommendations were incisive and prescient. Unfortunately, they were ignored.

In fact, in March 1960 an Exercise called "Lal Qila" was conducted by the Eastern Army Commander under instructions from the Army Chief General Thimayya to wargame the strategy of a three-tier defence in NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh). This strategy involved employing troops for early warning in the first layer, "delaying" enemy advance with the second layer and engagement through a well-entrenched third layer of troops on favourable terrain along a 'defensive line' in depth areas that were well connected by supply lines (Verma 2016). Air Commodore Ramesh Phadke states that using the Indian Air Force in offensive role was integral to Exercise Lal Qila and Indian Army's war plans (Phadke 2012).

While the reasons for not employing the strategies that were war-gamed including through the use of the Indian Air Force in offensive role in the 1962 war are not germane to this discussion, such debates are important to identify elements that influenced India's

attitudes towards use of force vis-à-vis China during this period. It emerges that contrary to conventional wisdom, the problem lay not in inadequate contingency planning and non-existence of prudent operational plans but in faulty implementation, disregard of professional military advice, frequent changes of leadership during the war, sub-optimal use of air power, and some bad luck.

While much has been said about India's defeat against China in the 1962 war, little effort has gone into analyzing the areas where India performed admirably. The war with China was fought in three sectors – Kameng & Walong Sectors in the East (Arunachal Pradesh) and Eastern Ladakh in J&K. Indian soldiers performed well in phases in the Walong Sector and in Eastern Ladakh. Lt. Gen. Bikram Singh was the GOC of 15 Corps during the 1962 war and was responsible for defence of Ladakh. He was a legend among the Lamas in Gumpas, Buddhist Monasteries of Ladakh. The general perception among the people is that he played a pivotal role in saving Ladakh. He is also known as the "Hero of Ladakh" and was worshipped by Kashmiris because he maintained peace and was apolitical (Banerji 2021).

Way back in the 1960s, Lt. Gen. Bikram Singh assessed the strategic significance of winning the trust of the people. According to Maj. Gen. S.V.P. Singh, this policy of his was the precursor of "hearts and minds" initiatives of the Indian Army. Unfortunately, two celebrated Rimcollians – Lt Gen Bikram Singh and Maj. Gen. Nanavati – who played important roles in Eastern Ladakh during the 1962 war, died in a helicopter crash on 22 November 1963 in J&K. We owe a debt of gratitude to these Rimcollians who selflessly served the nation and left a legacy on the importance of both head and heart in military leadership.

India displayed the ability to bounce back quickly after the debilitating experience in 1962. After the 1962 War, Brig. P.S. Bhagat was selected to play a seminal role in drafting the Henderson Brooks-Bhagat Report or the "NEFA Inquiry", which led to robust organizational changes in military and civilian security structures including for collection of technical intelligence & overseas intelligence, reorganization of Commands, reallocation of Headquarters and Directorates, raising new forces for mountain warfare, upgrading border infrastructure and roads and involvement of border populations in security structures. India's excellent performance in the Nathu La and Cho La conflicts with China in the Sikkim Sector in 1967 and staring the dragon in the face during the Wangdung crisis in the Samdurong Chu Valley in Arunachal Pradesh in 1986-87 could be attributed to the implementation of recommendations put forward by Brig. P.S. Bhagat.

One of the strategic cultural attributes that emerge from the strategic engagements with the Chinese in the post-1962 period include taking proactive steps to convey intent to

protect sovereignty backed up by capabilities to maintain supply lines including transportation of heavy weapons to inhospitable terrains and exploitation of strategic airlift capability. India has also not been averse to pro-active occupation of territory to exploit advantages of geography, a trait that has endured in subsequent conflicts. On the political front, there has been willingness to bind Himalayan States in the North like Nepal and Bhutan into common security arrangements and treaties to assuage their anxieties. The merger of Sikkim in 1975 under very trying circumstances was a culmination of this strategic effort.

OPERATIONS SHORT OF WAR (1972-1997)

The third phase in the evolution of India's attitudes towards use of force during the 1972-97 period often does not receive the attention it deserves. This is primarily because India did not fight a large-scale conventional war during this phase. However, the attitudes towards use of force during this period evolved along with the changing nature of warfare and the developments in India's neighbourhood.

Following the herculean efforts of teams led by "gallant soldier warrior" Lt. Gen. P.S. Bhagat on Indian side and "respected veteran" Lt Gen Hameed Khan of Pakistan, the Suchetgarh Agreement was signed on 11 December 1972. This delineated the Line of Control in J&K resulting from the Ceasefire of 17 December 1971 in accordance with the Simla Agreement of 2 July 1972 (Chibber 1972). Lt. Gen. P.S. Bhagat also raised the Northern Command in June 1972. As its first GOC-in-C, he laid strong foundations for several subsequent operations along the northern borders with Pakistan and China. The Northern Command has also been at the forefront of countering challenges posed by cross border terrorism and proxy war in J&K. The 2016 Surgical Strikes were conducted by Northern Command.

One of the key drivers of military change in the mid-1970s and 1980s was the need to create options to overcome the defensive obstacles that had been put up by Pakistan between the international border and vital objectives in the hinterland. This is borne out by the writings of one of India's strategic doyens Mr. K. Subramanyam who identified in an article in 1972 the need to develop mobile offensive options to breach defence and water obstacles to deter Pakistan (Subrahmanyam 1972: xxv).

The nuclearisation of the sub-continent, the emergence of proxy war in J&K in late 1980s, India's involvement in operations short of war in the immediate neighbourhood and testing of innovative battlefield concepts were the drivers of change during this phase. Once again Rimcollians played a seminal role in shaping India's strategies during this period.

General G.G. Bewoor was the Chief of the Army Staff from January 1973 to May 1975. He was the Southern Army Commander during the 1971 War, which was tasked with creating punitive options through capture or threat of capture of territory along four sectors on the Western front: Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Barmer and Kutch. For his excellent command in the Rajasthan Sector, General Bewoor was awarded the *Padma Bhushan*. The actions of Southern Command through capture of territory in the southern portion of the Western Sector formed the basis for structural organizational changes in subsequent years. These changes would help create options for the Army in the Western Sector to overcome the placement of static defences and water obstacles on its side by Pakistan.

India's "peaceful nuclear explosion" code named "Smiling Buddha" was conducted on 18 May 1974. This was the culmination of a series of efforts that commenced as early as 1944 with the creation of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) under the legendary Homi Jehangir Bhabha. General Bewoor was also taken into confidence in June 1973 by the Prime Minister in the run-up to the tests. In fact, General Bewoor was personally present at the test site in Pokhran and was the first to inform D.P. Dhar on telephone in the Prime Minister's Office about the successful tests.

Pakistan, under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had successfully pleaded with the Indian Prime Minister in Simla in 1972 to be let off after the 1971 debacle with India, was determined to develop a nuclear weapon "even if it had to eat grass". Western nations looked the other way as Pakistan clandestinely stole technology in the 1970s and 1980s to develop nuclear weapons. This was a quid pro quo for Pakistan's covert support to the Afghan Mujahideen against the USSR. These developments are very significant because they laid the foundation for Pakistan's involvement in a proxy war in J&K after the Afghan War was over. It also created a new paradigm for operational planners who had to prepare for military engagements under the nuclear overhang. This "doctrinal puzzle" for strategic planners has been eloquently captured in a book by a second generation Rimcollian Col. Ali Ahmed Zaki, son of another illustrious Rimcollian, Lt. Gen. M.A. Zaki, who highlights the need to adapt for military operations in the nuclear age (Zaki 2014). These issues are discussed in detail later in the chapter.

An institutionalized process of perspective planning was initiated in mid-1970s with the creation of the K.V. Krishna Rao Committee in 1976 soon after General Bewoor demitted office (Rao 1991). This was formalized through the creation of a full-fledged Directorate of Perspective Planning in 1986. Innovative concepts of maneuver warfare, dissuasive posture and deterrence capability were tested in the 1980s by holding high-profile exercises. Some of

the changes instituted during this period that have endured include innovative deployment of mechanized forces, enhancing speed of deployment, increased use of Special Forces, creation of expeditionary capability, proactive approach to deterrence and creation of conventional options under the nuclear overhang.

Rimcollians have been at the forefront of many of these changes. One of India's most admired and revered Rimcollians General V.N. Sharma was the "Chief Umpire" during the famous Brasstacks Exercise. He also took strong stands during the second phase of the Wangdung/Samdurong Chu stand-off with China in 1987 as the Eastern Army Commander. General Sharma was Chief of the Army Staff during the Maldives Operations in November 1988 and during the closing phases of the Sri Lanka Operations. Many generations of Indian military officers have attended presentations at Staff College on the exploits of Gp. Capt. Anant Gopal Bewoor, a second generation Rimcollian and son of General G.G. Bewoor, who was in the leading IL-76 aircraft that in Hulhule (Male) airport with Indian troops on board during Operation Cactus in the Maldives. It was a daring landing, which had to be undertaken with stealth amid uncertainty about runway security. Air Marshal N.C. Suri, later the Air Chief, was the Vice Chief of Air Staff directing the air effort in Maldives.

In Sri Lanka, Maj. Gen. Ashok Mehta commanded a Division as part of Indian Peacekeeping Forces. He was later founding member of Defence Planning Staff in the Ministry of Defence. A renowned writer and strategic thinker, General Mehta has played a sterling role on India-Nepal Track 2 Dialogue. He was advisor to the Gurkha Memorial Trust and maintains excellent relations with his fellow Gurkha soldiers in Nepal to this day. Several other Rimcollians like Lt. Col. Manoranjan Singh (later Brigadier), who was awarded Vir Chakra in Sri Lanka, kept up the traditions of valour, leadership and selfless service.

The simultaneous deployment of Indian forces in these two theatres in the Indian Ocean displayed India's willingness to project power to protect its interests and to support its neighbours on their request. This was a significant progression in India's attitudes towards use of force. Subsequently, India also showed similar intent to protect the interests of its neighbour in Doklam, close to the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction. Post Doklam, a Rimcollian scholar warrior and former GOC of 8 Mountain Division, Maj. Gen. Dipankar Banerjee was a member of a select group of former officials from India and China including Ambassador Shyam Saran and State Councillor Dai Bingguo, which met in Chengdu in 2017 prior to the Wuhan Summit between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping. He has been part of several confidential building and cooperation projects with China including a June 1991 follow-up to Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988.

Any discussion on evolution of India's strategic culture will not be complete without a reference to India's counter-insurgency experience in the North-East and J&K. In the North East, the Naga insurgency evolved in two stages. The first phase was from 1954 to 1975. This led to signing of the Shillong Accord. The second phase from 1980 to date has only been partially resolved. The Mizo insurgency was resolved after almost two decades of engagement from 1966 to 1986. The ULFA in Assam has been involved in an insurgency since 1979 and are in talks with the government. One of India's leading strategic analysts on the North East is a Rimcollian, Mr. Jaideep Saikia. What is striking in his books is the seamless linkages he brings out between the internal and external dimensions of terrorism and insurgency in the North East (Saikia 2006 & 2007).

Rimcollians have played a seminal role in dealing with insurgencies almost since independence in 1947. General Thimayya and Lt. Gen. K.P. Candeth earned their spurs based on early experiences in battling the Pathan tribals in the Northwest Frontier regions. General Bewoor had also served in Waziristan during the Second World War. They played important roles in the early years in shaping India's attitudes towards use of force in domestic insurgencies. In later years, Lt. Gen. Candeth was appointed the first GOC of the famous 8 Mountain Division that was re-raised in the early 1960s primarily to deal with Naga insurgents. This Division has earned the famous epithet "forever in operations" because it has constantly been involved in military engagements including wars and insurgencies in diverse strategic settings in Nagaland, Manipur, Bangladesh Liberation, Kashmir Valley, Kargil and Leh (Palsokar 1991).

In J&K, Rimcollians have been integral to the CI effort since inception. Lt. Gen. M.A. Zaki and Lt. Gen. S. Padmanabhan were both GOC's of Srinagar based 15 Corps during critical periods in the insurgency. AVM Subramaniam has documented the contributions of these two Rimcollian Generals in the second volume of his magnum opus on India's wars (Subramaniam 2020: 244-249, 341-349). General Zaki was GOC 15 Corps when the insurgency broke out in J&K in 1989. The initial policies on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism in J&K were developed under his watch. More importantly, General Zaki gained a deep understanding of the people, politics and policies in Kashmir Valley, which stood him in good stead as Advisor to the Governor J&K between 1991-95.

Both these Rimcollian Generals were holding important posts during the Hazratbal crisis in 1993. During this operation, the Indian Army deployed a "Boa Constriction" strategy to strangle access of militants to replenishments, food, etc. even as negotiations for their surrender continued simultaneously. The Hazratbal crisis was handled differently from the

approach followed during Operation Blue Star in 1984, Operation Black Thunder in 1988 and the Charar-e-Sharif operations in 1995. The tenures of these two Rimcollian Generals also coincided with a number of counter-insurgency innovations including raising of the Rashtriya Rifles, "hot pursuit", proactive targeting of Pakistani bunkers & laying ambushes across, as well as people-centric policies, protection of human rights and rehabilitation & surrender policies.

A unique strategic cultural attribute of India's approach to dealing with domestic insurgencies has been employment of organizational and operational innovations that are distinctly Indian. Soon after independence, the political and military leadership overturned the Frontier Policy of the British that treated insurgents as enemies. In turn, insurgents were to be treated as misguided fellow countrymen who had to be integrated into the mainstream. It was ensured that the country should adjust to the customs, traditions and local sensitivities of Border States rather than the other way round. At the same time, robust training in CI tactics and best practices were introduced, incremental devolution of powers to local populations was ensured by granting Statehood/UT status or making special Constitutional dispensations. Incorporation of former insurgents in official positions of prominence has also marked India's CI strategies (Chadha 2005 & 2016, Rajagopalan 2008). Several Rimcollians have been involved in fighting CI operations since independence and helped shape a unique Indian way of fighting insurgencies. Among the leaders at all levels including tactical, operational and strategic are five Army Commanders of the strategic Eastern Command – Generals Thimayya, K. Chiman Singh, V.N. Sharma, R.N. Batra and J.S. "Jat" Varma.

There have been occasions when India has not been able to employ the right balance between use of military force and political initiatives. However, over the years especially since the 1980s, the use of political strategies has become more prominent especially in ending insurgencies (Rajagopalan 2008, Ayesha Ray 2016). In addition, India's counter-insurgency doctrines now articulate that the "Armed Forces are to act as facilitators to bring down violence" so that political processes can be initiated and other elements of national power including civilian administration can take over their normal functions. This was practiced with alacrity during the final stages of the Punjab insurgency (Chima 2007: 629-630, Joshi 1993 & 1997).

CREATING PUNITIVE OPTIONS IN A NUCLEARIZED ENVIRONMENT (1997- 2022)

The final phase of the evolution of India's strategic culture based on attitudes

towards use of military force is marked by creating punitive options, both conventional and sub-conventional, in a nuclearised environment in the sub-continent. The journey to nuclearisation of the sub-continent was arduous and prolonged. Nuclear tests by China between 1964 and 1966 at Lop Nur forced a re-think in India's nuclear policy. Till then, the focus of India's nuclear programme was more on peaceful uses of nuclear energy although retaining the weaponisation option remained an article of faith with successive governments before and after the experience in early 1960s. India rejected the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1969 because it created a distinction between "haves" and "have nots".

Finally, India and Pakistan went overtly nuclear in May 1998. India opted for a policy of qualified No-First Use (NFU) and credible minimum deterrence. One of the most important elements of "credible" deterrence was the creation of a nuclear triad – land, air and sea-based deterrence, which would bolster the policy of assured and massive retaliation. In 2018, India joined the exclusive club of countries that had operationalised an indigenously developed ballistic missile capable submarine, thereby completing the final sea-based element of its triad. The role of a Rimcollian Vice Admiral P.C. Bhasin, a former DG of the ATV programme, in the conceptualization and construction of India's first indigenous nuclear submarine has been discussed by several noted analysts (Unnithan 2020). Other Rimcollians have also been involved with this project in different capacities. What is noteworthy about this project is how successive teams overcame challenges to develop this very complex weapon platform. The experience gained in terms of project management, systems integration and indigenous production has been a forerunner for several subsequent projects like the Light Combat Aircraft.

Demonstration of its nuclear capability made Pakistan believe that conflicts would now remain "limited" in both scope and duration. This was the backdrop under which it undertook the misadventure to occupy strategic heights on the Indian side of the Line of Control in J&K, hype up the possibility of nuclear war through an information campaign and force a ceasefire, freezing the situation in Pakistan's favour.

For India, the Kargil conflict in 1999 provided an important inflection point in attitudes towards use of force. This was the first 'limited war' fought under a nuclear overhang. Even though the country was taken by surprise by an audacious operation by the adversary, the Indian politico-military leadership once again displayed the capacity to bounce back. Clear war aims were set, which included clearing intrusions and not crossing the LoC. The leadership stuck to these aims. In many ways, Kargil war was India's first information-age war marked by use of psychological operations, information warfare, use of precision

guided munitions and use of restraint and ethical conduct as a tool to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the international community.

The role of Rimcollians during Kargil was key to success across all dimensions. The Northern Army Commander Lt. Gen. H.M. Khanna supervised the effective ground counter-attack, which is part of military folklore. Western Air Command under Air Marshal Vinod Patney launched Operation Safed Sagar, an unprecedented air effort at high altitude and in difficult terrain. He was ably supported at the operational level by Wing Commander (later Air Chief Marshal) B.S. Dhanoa, who devised innovative night bombing methods at high altitudes. One of the world's most accurate and lethal Artillery firepower was directed by the Indian Army during this war. It is noteworthy that a Rimcollian Lt. Gen. Vinay Shankar was the Director General of Artillery during this war. These Rimcollians and several others won gallantry awards and set the tone for conduct of military operations in the Kargil sector under a nuclear overhang.

The Kargil War was followed by one of the most significant reviews of national security in the post-independence period. The findings of the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) were even published in the public domain (KRC Report 2000). This was a significant progression from previous wars where classified reports on the war have still not been released. This was followed by a Report of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on strengthening national security, which was coordinated by the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS). Among the prominent structural changes that followed the KRC Report and GoM recommendations was the creation of the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO). The first Chairman of NTRO was a Rimcollian Major R.S. Bedi, a brilliant IPS officer.

Several Rimcollians have served with distinction in the NTRO, NSCS, think tanks and other civilian wings of the government including the IAS, IPS, IDAS and security agencies. Major General Samir Sinha endeared himself to generations of scholar warriors as Director of the United Services Institution (USI). A Memorial Lecture is held in his honour every year at the USI. Several others like Bikram Singh, Sidharth Mishra, Col. Shailender Arya, Col. R.S.N. Singh, and Captain Gurpreet Khurana have shown that Rimcollians can wield the pen as much as the sword.

Subsequent military engagements after Kargil - Operation Parakaram 2002-03, counter-insurgency/counter-infiltration actions in J&K, Uri 2016 and Balakot 2019 – involved new techniques and innovative methodologies. These added to India's toolkit of punitive options in a nuclearised environment. General Padmanabhan was the Army Chief during Operation Parakaram. This mobilization of forces and resultant threat of use of force

was followed by a five year long ceasefire between 2003-08. This provided time to rebuild defences, erect a multi-layered obstacle system along the Western border and conduct secret back-channel talks. New techniques of counter-infiltration and counter-insurgency were adopted to deal with the changing nature of war. The Balakot operations in 2019 were conducted under the guidance of Air Chief Marshal B.S. Dhanoa, one of India's most respected Rimcollians and air warriors, with Air Marshal C Hari Kumar, AOC-in-C Western Air Command as in-charge of "Operation Bandar".

From the strategic cultural perspective, during this phase there was constant learning. Course corrections were applied, where necessary. The political and military leadership showed progressively positive intent to use force, albeit in a calibrated and restrained manner. It was also ensured that following every provocation, the adversary was convinced that inimical actions would lead to retaliation, despite feeble attempts at nuclear sabre-rattling. At the same time, there was also a clear understanding about the limitations of the use of force to achieve desired objectives and the need for balance it with other tools of conflict resolution including diplomacy, international support, and bilateral engagement.

CONCLUSION

It emerges from this study that the Indian experience in the use or threat of use of military force is varied and possibly unparalleled anywhere else in the world. During this journey, the Indian politico-military leadership has managed diverse challenges including dealing with external threats and handling the fissiparous internal challenges of economic development, integrating frontier populations, managing secessionist tendencies within the confines of a democratic polity governed by a Constitution that respected diverse points of view and ensured equality of opportunity for all sections of society.

Indian politico-military leadership based their decision-making on several realist considerations including the global power dynamics, material capabilities of adversaries, internal compulsions and strategic considerations such as terrain, weather and level of preparation. At the same time, the leadership defined its approach towards use of force in a manner that reflected both personal preferences of the politico-military leadership, past memories and cultural beliefs of the nation including its formative experiences and the organisational cultures of the organisations that were prosecuting war or handling domestic insurgencies and other operations short of war.

Over time, these ideational attributes evolved into a 'way of war' that was based on certain strategic preferences regarding overt and covert use of force, conducting diplomacy

and deployment of secret intelligence in diverse strategic circumstances like wars, border conflicts, insurgencies, consolidating national territory and ensuring territorial integrity. These 'ways of war' and strategic preferences also evolved over time.

As this chapter shows, the role of Rimcollians in this endeavour was not only significant but their legacies have also endured. RIMC and countless Rimcollians continue to epitomize the essence of soldiering and selfless national service. It has been both an honour and pleasure to pen this chapter and pay a tribute to our Alma Mater on the occasion of the Centenary.

Like all studies, the narrative remains incomplete. Several more chapters need to be written to do justice to the individual contributions of Rimcollians in the evolution of India's strategic culture. I am sure this will provide an important starting point to delve deeper into the details.

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