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# INDIAN MILITARY AND ITS ROLE IN FOREIGN POLICY

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The military and civil dimensions of administration no longer work independently. The active role of the military in determining foreign policy has become a standard practice globally. This lecture is divided into three segments: the role of armed forces, the Indian context, and what can be done to improve the relationship between the two branches.

### **Role of Armed Forces**

While military governance has limited scope in political affairs within a democratic government, there are instances where armed forces overstep elected governments to decide the course of foreign policy. The Korean War of 1950 and the Iran War are examples of this overstepping. Conversely, there are events where armed forces are not considered as important stakeholders for foreign policy decisions. There is a need to incorporate them, especially when decisions related to the armed forces are made. For example, when negotiating deals about weaponry, the opinion of the armed forces must be incorporated.

### **Indian Context**

There is a differentiation of spheres in the academic domain, distinguishing between political and defence topics. In reality, there is always an overlap between the two domains. In the Indian scenario, there is some void of military officials at negotiation tables. This approach is slowly changing, but it will take time to match the practices of developing countries. In India, military diplomacy occurs on two fronts:

1. What Happens in Delhi: Interaction with diplomats and foreign policy experts, national security advisors, ad hoc committees, and the MEA (Ministry of External Affairs) discuss armed forces based on case to case basis. In recent years, individuals from the armed forces have been associated with the MEA.
2. Determining Defence Policy: Interaction with HQIDS (Headquarters of Integrated Defence Staff) and MODs (Ministry of Defence):
  - Higher officials visit foreign countries for professional exchange, building relations, and training.
  - Military exercises and professional learning, such as adopting best practices from Japanese expertise in submarine technology.

- Defence Attaches: They play a multifaceted role in learning, signalling, and fostering friendly relations. In India, the practice of professionally upward mobile officers are sent as military attaches which is a common practice. They represent Indian defence industry interests. India has initiated DA (Defence Attache) conclaves worldwide, with around 64 DAs, which is expected to increase.
- However, this is not at par with other countries like China (around 110) and the UK (145). These numbers need consideration in view of growing stature of India. There is a need for rationalisation of DAs, as some locations have an over-numbered presence of officers with the same ranks.

### **What Can Be Done**

There is a need for more convergence between military officials and diplomats. They must be deployed together. Trust-building measures need to be taken by the armed forces to shed the phobia of civil governance. Considering India's vast geography, the military can play an important role in assisting the country's foreign policy. Joint commands, especially in the Eastern sector and CMLV (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam) countries, can serve as sources of diplomacy. Using the Global South as a parameter for leading military diplomacy is crucial. Defence attaches should be more pragmatic, considering the import and export of arms, and representing domestic defence industry interests. Additionally, there is a need to educate foreign countries about the Indian military and its role in diplomacy.