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CIS BRIEFING NOTE:

INDIA'S ARMED FORCES (APRIL 1990) (U)

1. (U) This briefing note is a DG Int/DINWP general overview of the Indian Armed Forces. The information contained herein incorporates material available as of 01 Apr 1990. This briefing was prepared specifically to support personnel visiting India in a military or official capacity. It is intended as a background, introductory summary of the Indian Armed Forces, concentrating on the Indian Army.

2. (U) This report constitutes a general discussion of the subject matter and not a comprehensive, all-encompassing intelligence analysis. The CIS contact for South Asia is DG Int/DINWP 2-3; commercial telephone number (613) 996-8468. Comments regarding the contents of this briefing would be appreciated.

J.B. O'Reilly
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Director General Intelligence

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PART I - INTRODUCTION (U)

1. (U) The Indian military has a long and proud history. Today, many of these traditions are still very much alive, and India's military might is a major source of public national pride. A strong Armed Forces is one of the most important means by which India hopes to achieve its aim of becoming the dominant regional power in South Asia. This briefing will deal with the structure and capabilities of the Indian military, concentrating on the Army.

THE THREAT (U)

2. (C) Indian perceptions of the external threat facing the country are related to its two major foreign policy goals, as follows:

- a. to achieve undisputed military and political pre-eminence in South Asia; and
- b. to ensure the elimination of interference by non-regional powers in the Indian Ocean area.

3. (S) Pakistan is regarded by India as its most pressing military threat. During the past 40 years, India has fought three major wars with Pakistan, and border incidents erupt frequently. The disputed status of Kashmir remains a major obstacle in the way of improved relations. Another source of distrust is Delhi's belief that Islamabad refuses to accept its inferior military status and is attempting to improve its military capabilities against India with foreign support. American military aid to Pakistan, which has recently taken the form of F-16s, warships, and HARPOON anti-shipping missiles, and Pakistan's nuclear programme, are viewed with considerable concern and have an important impact on Indian strategic planning.

4. (S) China is regarded as the major strategic threat, and as potentially the greatest danger to India's dominant place in South Asia. Long-standing disputes over many parts of the Sino-Indian border remain a primary irritant in relations with China. India's disastrous performance in the 1962 war with

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China marked the beginning of Indian determination to improve the capabilities of its military. It is unlikely that the Sino-Indian border problems will be resolved in the near future, but relations with China have recently been improving, and some movement towards a resolution may eventually be achieved.

5. (S) India wishes to be seen as the major power in South Asia, and is attempting to reduce the influence of the super-powers in the area. Delhi feels threatened by the US naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and considers this to be an intrusion into its sphere of influence. India's good relations with the Soviet Union have in the past muted its criticism of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, but India would prefer to see an end to all super-power activity in South Asia.

6. (S) India also faces a significant internal threat from various separatist groups. The greatest danger is represented by Sikh terrorists who are demanding an independent Sikh State in the Punjab. The State has been placed under direct rule by Delhi and the security forces have been greatly augmented. In addition, a series of low-level counter-insurgency campaigns in the Northeastern Hill areas against several tribal separatist groups has been ongoing almost continually since Independence. Security forces must also deal with periodic intercommunal rioting throughout the country, which could be sparked by almost any imaginable grievance.

THE ARMED FORCES COMMAND (U)

7. (C) The Indian Armed Forces have been organized and equipped to deal with these threats. The President is the official head of the Armed Forces, but real control is exercised by the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. The three service headquarters, each under its own Chief of Staff, are subordinate to the Ministry of Defence. Each service is independent, and there is no joint command organization. A Chiefs of Staff Committee provides the government with collective military advice, and serves as a coordinating body for government directives. In 1986, a Defence Planning Staff was created to provide staff support to this committee, but it will take several years for it to become an effective organization.

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PART II - THE INDIAN ARMY (U)

MISSIONS (U)

8. (C) The wartime mission of the Indian Army is to conduct land warfare in the defence of India, in conjunction with the Navy and the Air Force. The peacetime missions include:

- training for war;
- assisting in the maintenance of internal order;
- supporting civil emergency relief operations; and
- undertaking engineering projects.

CAPABILITIES (U)

9. (C) The Army is capable of conducting conventional offensive and defensive operations against Pakistan, and could defend against a conventional attack by China. It could also deploy an effective expeditionary force (for a limited duration) in the South Asia region, as has been demonstrated in Sri Lanka. The Army is also capable of maintaining internal security, in conjunction with paramilitary forces. Of note, however, the paramilitary forces normally undertake such internal security tasks, with the regular Army being called in as a last resort. Understandably, the Army is known to dislike performing internal security operations.

10. (C) The principal strengths of the Indian Army are its large size and the excellent fighting qualities of its individual soldiers, particularly in defence.

11. (C) A major weakness of the Army is the lack of standardization of equipment, which poses tactical, training, maintenance and logistical problems. Complicating this aspect is the shortage of technically trained personnel to operate and maintain the increasingly complex equipment being introduced into the Army order of battle.

PERSONNEL (U)

12. (S) The present strength of the Indian Army stands at about 1.2 million men, which makes it the third largest army in the world. This figure does not include approximately three quarters of a million paramilitary forces, many of which can be integrated with the Army if required.

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13. (S) Gurkha troops, recruited in Nepal, comprise more than 10% of the Army's total strength. Sikhs make up 20-25% of the officer corps and 10-15% of the other ranks. Morale among Sikhs in the Army is generally low, and this may have a long-term effect on operational effectiveness.

14. (C) The rank structure of the Indian Army follows the British model, but includes an additional level of leadership: the junior commissioned officer, which roughly equates to warrant officer. The JCO is an older soldier who has risen through the ranks and normally fills platoon commander or equivalent positions. Because of the presence of JCOs, the ratio of commissioned officers to other ranks is relatively low.

ORGANIZATION AND DEPLOYMENT (U)

15. (S) The Army is organized into five geographical commands, which have been assigned both administrative and tactical authority. Ten Corps Headquarters, subordinate to these commands, are the highest tactical echelons. The unit organization follows the British model. There are no established organization tables for units above battalion level; brigades, divisions and corps are assigned units and formations as the tactical situation demands.

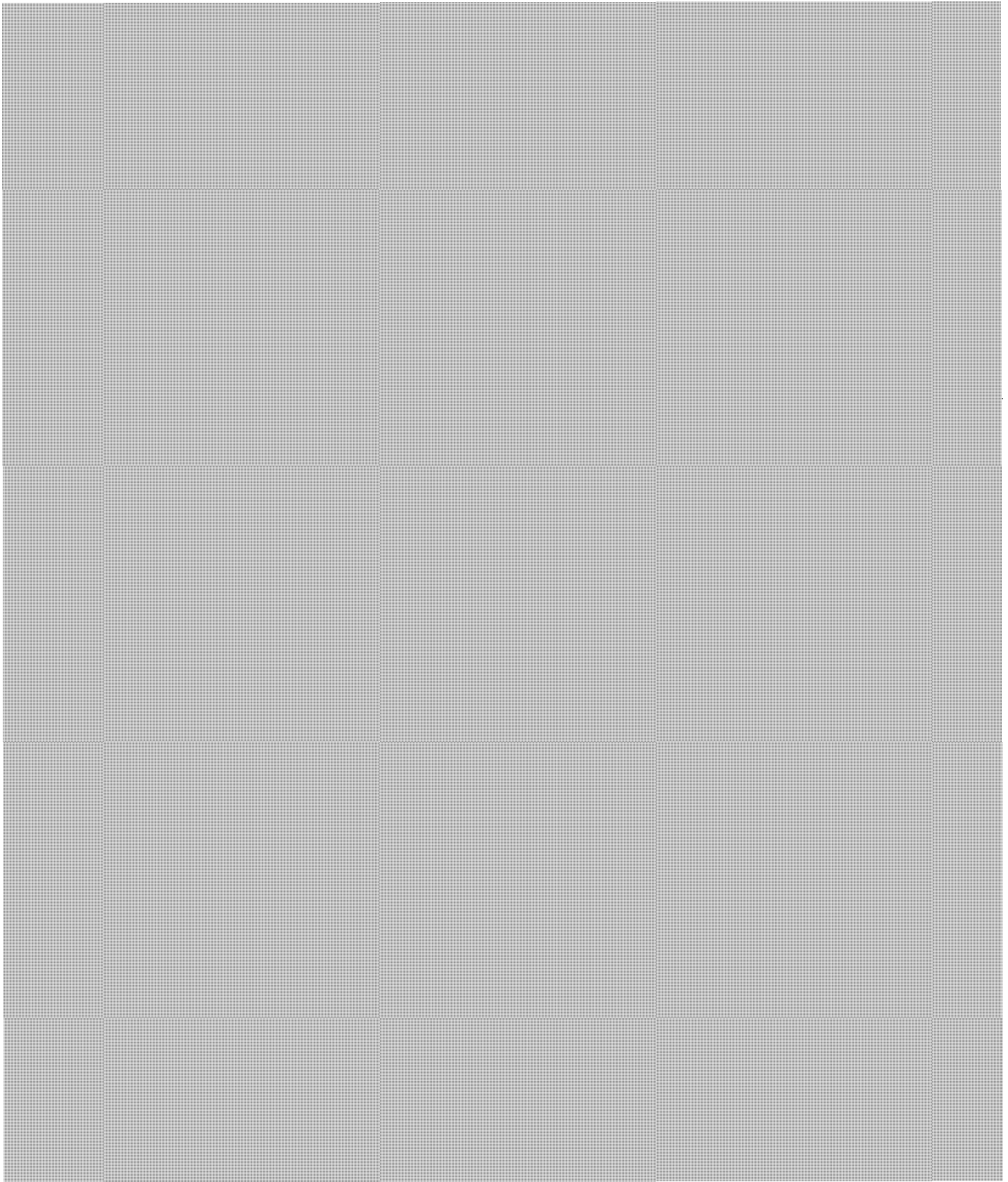
16. (S) The Indian Army contains a total of 34 divisions of the following types:

- two Armoured Divisions;
- one Mechanized Division (with one more currently being raised);
- 20 Infantry Divisions (including three 'Rapids');
- 11 Mountain Divisions.

There are also several additional Independent Air Defence, Armoured, Artillery, Engineer, Parachute and Infantry Brigades. India intends to increase the number of divisions to about 40, but this has apparently been postponed. In the interim, several infantry divisions are being given more mobility with the assignment of an additional mechanized brigade (these are called 'Rapids' divisions. Normal infantry divisions are largely foot-mounted).

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17. (S) Divisions generally have one artillery and three manoeuvre brigades, and brigades normally consist of three to five battalions. Mountain Divisions are lightly equipped and specially trained infantry formations. Division strengths average approximately 16,000 personnel.

18. (S) Indian Army formations are deployed to counter the major perceived threats from Pakistan and China. The Armoured and Mechanized Divisions are concentrated in the Punjab, and the Mountain Divisions along the eastern sector of the Sino-Indian border. As a general rule, about 50% of India's combat power is aligned against Pakistan, 30% against the PRC and the remainder held in Central India as a strategic reserve.

ARMY AVIATION (U)

19. (S) In 1986, control of most tactical helicopter assets were transferred from the Air Force to the Army. The seven Air Observation Post (AOP) Squadrons are now manned and controlled by the Army. As part of a compromise, the Air Force still retains control of the 12 MI-25/HIND attack helicopters in the Indian inventory, as well as the transport helicopters (although this may change in the future).

WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT (U)

20. (S) The Indian Army holds a mixture of imported and indigenously produced equipment. Most of the basic items required by the Army can be produced in India.

21. (S) The current main battle tank is the Indian "VIJAYANTA", based on the British-designed Vickers, of which there are currently over 1,700 in service. Eight hundred and fifty T-55 tanks remain in service, most of them up-gunned to 105-mm. Work is proceeding on a new Indian-designed tank, the "ARJUN", which is planned to begin production in the 1990s. Progress has been slow, however, and until then, the Army will continue procuring the Soviet T-72. At least 700 of the latter are now in service, and the T-72M is currently being produced in India. Seven hundred Soviet BMPs, as well as several hundred older APCs, equip the Indian mechanized battalions. Additional infantry combat vehicles are being produced in India for the planned expansion of the mechanized forces. Anti-tank weapons include the SS-11 and Milan ATGMS, as well as AT-3/SAGGERS mounted on the BMPs.

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22. (S) The Indian-developed 130-mm "CATAPULT SP" gun has not proven successful, and most Indian artillery units remain equipped with older 105-mm and 130-mm towed guns. A contract has been signed with Bofors for the purchase/production of 400 x 155-mm towed howitzers. Air defence weapons are mostly of Soviet origin, and include the ZSU 23-4, SA-6/GAINFUL and SA-7/GRAIL.

23. (S) India obtains its military equipment from a variety of sources to ensure that it is not dependent on any one supplier. However, because of its close relationship with the Soviet Union, and the low relative cost of Soviet arms, much of the Indian inventory is from Soviet sources. Indian defence production capabilities are considerable, and agreements are usually made to produce or assemble new equipment in India.

RECENT OPERATIONS (U)

24. (S) From Jul 87 to Mar 90, four Indian Divisions, totalling over 55,000 troops, were deployed in Sri Lanka as the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF). In Jul 87, the Sri Lankan and Indian governments signed an accord to end the Tamil insurgency on the island. The IPKF was sent to guarantee the agreement, but in Oct 87 it was forced to launch military operations against the main Tamil group, which refused to lay down its arms. After heavy fighting, the Tamil stronghold in the north was taken by Indian troops, but the Tamils have since harassed the IPKF into departing Sri Lanka. Over 1,200 Indian troops were killed in the campaign. It is not expected that the Indian Army will return to Sri Lanka in the foreseeable future, despite not having achieved its original aim of resolving the Tamil issue.

25. (S) Over the past few years, there have been a number of clashes with Pakistani troops in the Siachen Glacier area, an extremely mountainous and isolated region in northern Kashmir. Indian troops have established themselves on passes at the head of the Glacier, and in Oct 87, a Pakistani attack in probably battalion-strength was defeated with major loss of life. Both sides are maintaining considerable forces in the area, and the Siachen dispute remains a major irritant between the two countries.

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26. (C) The status of the entire Kashmir region has been a direct cause of two of the three major wars between India and Pakistan. The disputed State remains split between the two countries, with India holding about two thirds of the predominantly Moslem region. Kashmiris in Indian Jammu and Kashmir, seeking either a merger with Pakistan or outright independence, stepped up efforts in Dec 89 to achieve their goals. Violence is now a daily occurrence, and over 300 people have been killed in the State this year. The Army has been employed mainly as a standby force so far, but the regular military is being used more frequently as the situation deteriorates. The Air Force units in the area are becoming favourite targets of the militants. Meanwhile, relations between India and Pakistan, which recently showed some signs of improvement, became seriously strained over the first five months of this year due to the Kashmir issue. So far, the evidence indicates that neither country wishes to again go to war over the dispute, but the possibility of a significant (probably isolated) clash along the Line of Control over the near term remains high.

27. (S) In Mar 87, India held a major joint exercise, called "BRASS TACKS", in the Thar Desert near the Pakistan border. This was the first exercise of this scale ever undertaken by India. The event seriously alarmed Pakistan, which began to mobilize its own forces and deploy them to the border area. To counter this action, the Indians redeployed some of their own resources. Diplomatic negotiations managed to reduce tensions before the situation got out of hand, but the "BRASS TACKS" affair will not likely be forgotten by Pakistan. The latter held a similar large-scale combined military exercise in Dec 89 ("ZARB-E-MOMIN"), but Islamabad went to great lengths to ensure that India was informed of all activity well in advance. As a result, the exercise passed without incident.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS (U)

28. (S) The Indian Army will continue to improve its ability to conduct mechanized operations. Equipment quality and quantity will also continue to improve. Most of the recent upgrades and qualitative advances in Army force structure and logistics have taken place along the Pakistani border, and the majority of Army equipment acquisitions are tailored for mobile operations in the Punjab. This reflects the emphasis in recent Indian defence planning regarding the threat from Pakistan.

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PART III - THE AIR FORCE, NAVY AND
PARAMILITARY FORCES (U)

29. (U) This section will address the structure and capabilities of the Indian Air Force, Navy and Paramilitary forces.

THE INDIAN AIR FORCE (U)

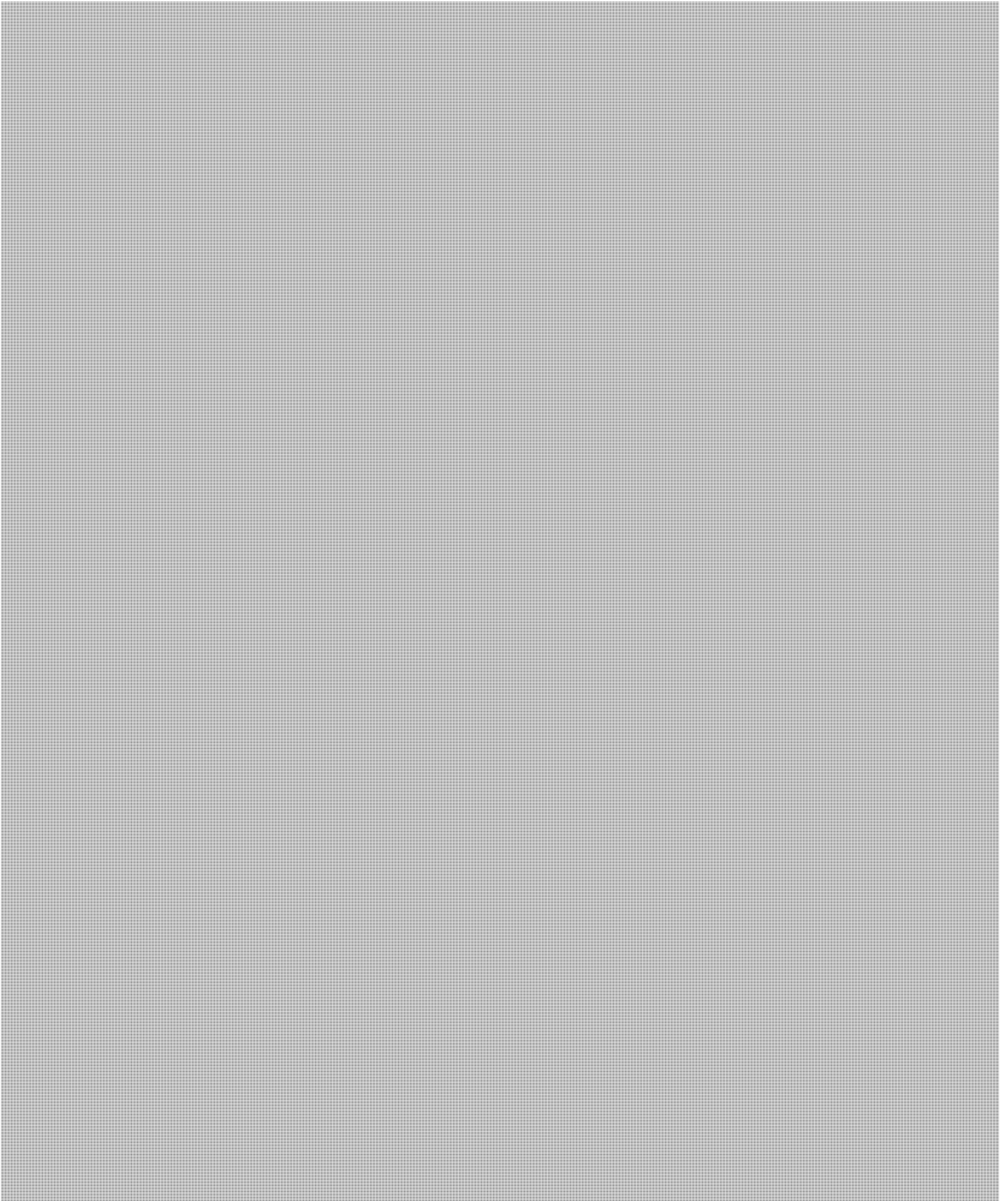
30. (S) The missions of the Indian Air Force are to conduct air defence, engage in strategic and tactical air operations, and provide tactical air support and airlift to the Army.

31. (S) The personnel strength of the Air Force is approximately 147,000. It has an aircraft strength of over 1,400. The Air Force is organized into five geographic operational commands and two support commands. Most of the IAF's 58 airfields are located along the Pakistani border and the western coastline. In addition, the IAF has designated 13 airfields as 'forward base support units', to be used as staging and recovery sites with a 45 day wartime stockpile capable of supporting two combat squadrons each. A programme has also been recently initiated to construct new air facilities in southern India with a view to improving power projection into the broad Indian Ocean area.

32. (S) The Air Force has 22 fighter-bomber squadrons, made up primarily of MIG-21/FISHBED, MIG-23 and MIG-27/FLOGGER, and JAGUAR. The 22 air defence/air superiority squadrons are equipped mainly with MIG-21/FISHBED, but some squadrons have recently been upgraded with MIRAGE 2000 and MIG-29/FULCRUM (44 of these state-of-the-art Soviet interceptors have been acquired by India, and more will be procured). The one light bomber squadron is equipped with the aging CANBERRA. The MIG-25/FOXBAT is taking over from the CANBERRA in the strategic recce role. The 11 transport squadrons are equipped with the IL-76/CANDID, the AN-12/CUB and a number of smaller aircraft, both Soviet and Western. The 19 helicopter units have MI-25/HIND attack helicopters, and MI-26/HALO and MI-8/17/HIP transport helicopters. The remainder of the Indian Air Force inventory is made up of training and utility aircraft. Indian air defence missiles include the SA-2/GUIDELINE and the SA-3/GOA.

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33. (S) Recent Indian acquisitions of modern aircraft types have significantly improved the Air Force's capabilities. It can effectively conduct operations against Pakistan and defend against the Chinese air threat. Weaknesses include maintenance, logistical and training difficulties associated with the varied sources and number of airframe types. In addition, the problem of retaining highly trained technicians is acute, and will become even more serious as more complex equipment is acquired.

THE INDIAN NAVY (U)

34. (S) The missions of the Navy are to conduct sea warfare in the national interest, ensure the security of India's coastline and island territories, and to counter the influence of foreign naval forces in the Indian Ocean.

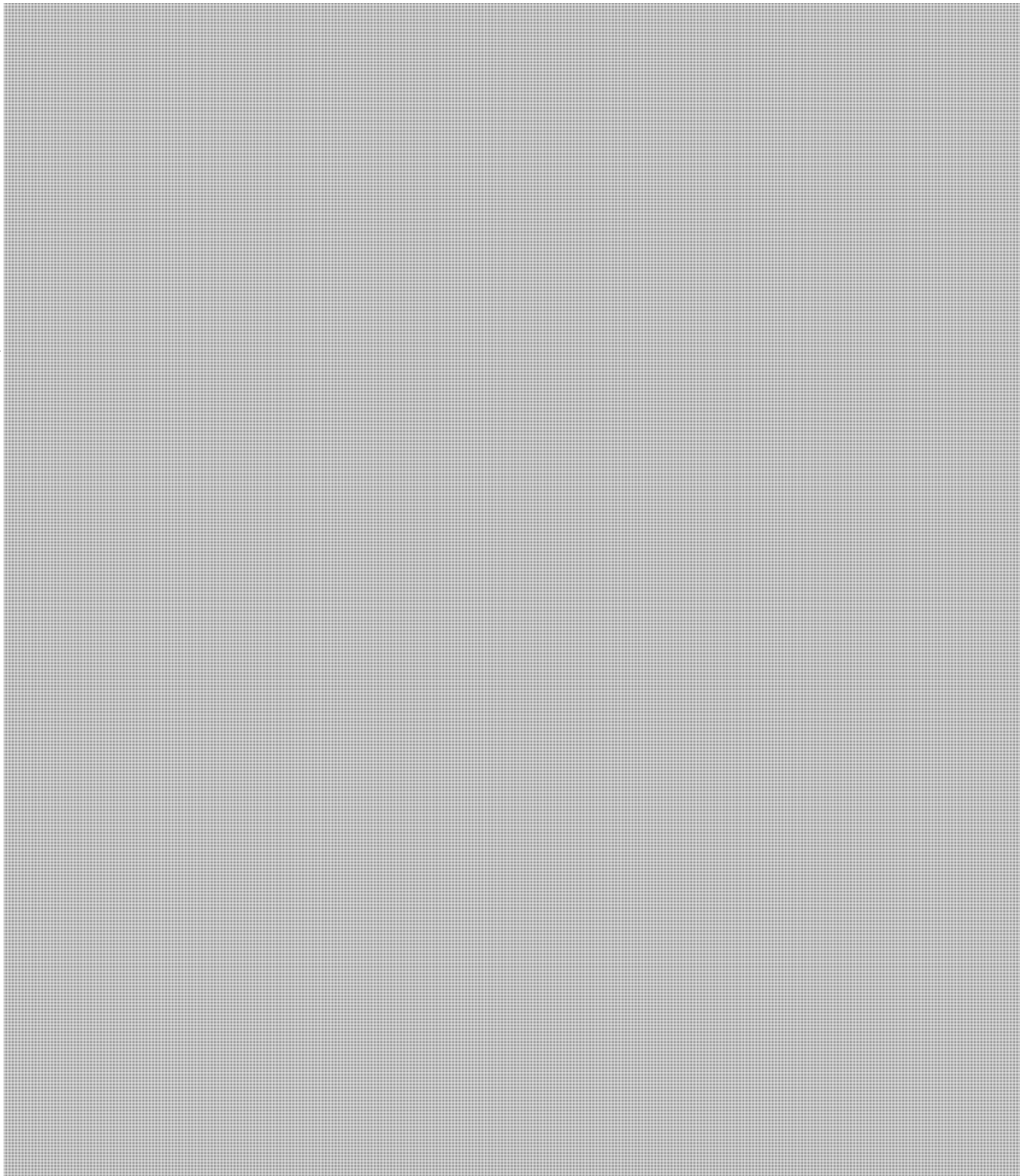
35. (S) The personnel strength of the Indian Navy is approximately 50,000. It has over 120 major vessels and the Naval Air Arm is made up of over 70 aircraft. It is organized into three major commands. The Western and Eastern Commands control most of the operational ships, with the Southern Command being devoted primarily to training.

36. (S) Over the past decade, the Indian Navy has grown significantly in size and capability. This reflects the long-term Indian determination to be the major naval power in the Indian Ocean. A large proportion of the Indian budget for capital acquisitions is now devoted to the Navy.

37. (S) With the commissioning of INS VIRAAT (the ex-HMS Hermes) in 1987, the Indian Navy now has two light aircraft carriers. A third is planned for construction in India in the mid-1990s, and will replace the aging INS VIKRANT. India's aim is to maintain one carrier task force on each coast, and suitable escort vessels are being acquired with this goal in mind.

38. (S) The most significant recent addition to the Indian fleet, aside from the delivery of a second carrier, was the lease of a Soviet CHARLIE I class nuclear-powered cruise missile submarine, the INS CHAKRA. This move has had an important political and military impact on the region. The number of Indian conventional submarines also continues to grow, with the ongoing acquisition of Soviet KILO class and West German TYPE 1500 attack submarines. Surface combatants

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include five Soviet KASHIN II class guided missile destroyers, several Western and Indian-built frigates and a large number of corvettes, missile attack boats and patrol boats. There is no Indian Marine Corps, but the Navy maintains a significant amphibious lift capability and can land up to a brigade of Army troops.

39. (S) The Indian Naval Air Arm is comprised of both Soviet and Western aircraft. The British SEA HARRIER VSTOL fighter has become the main carrier strike weapon. The recently acquired Soviet-supplied TU-142/BEAR F is the main ASW patrol aircraft, supported by older IL-38/MAY and ISLANDER aircraft. ASW helicopters include the KA-25/HORMONE and the SEA KING.

40. (S) The combat capability of the Indian Navy is generally well balanced, and the newer vessels are capable of operating throughout the Indian Ocean. The overall operational effectiveness of the Navy is limited, however, by the following factors:

- a lack of sufficient at-sea logistics support,
- the age of many ships,
- a lack of skilled manpower, and
- outdated tactical doctrine.

Despite these factors, the Indian Navy is capable of dominating any of the South Asian regional navies.

PARAMILITARY FORCES (U)

41. (S) Paramilitary forces, which do not come under the direct control of the Military (but could be easily integrated into it), total more than three quarters of a million men. In peacetime, most of these forces are controlled by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Some of the most important of these forces are described below.

42. (S) The Assam Rifles, with a strength of 36,000 are responsible for guarding the Burma, Bangladesh and eastern part of the Tibetan borders, and conducting counter-insurgency operations in the Northeastern Provinces. The Assam Rifles are organized and equipped as light infantry battalions.

43. (S) The Border Security Force (BSF) has a strength of over 90,000 troops and is responsible for border security, primarily along the Pakistani border. It also has a small

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counter-terrorist unit. The BSF was specifically designed to be compatible with the Army, and in the event of hostilities would immediately come under Army control. It is made up of 90 infantry battalions, with additional artillery, air and support units.

44. (S) The Indo-Tibetan Border Police and the Ladakh Scouts are deployed along the western part of the Tibetan border, and have similar missions. They are responsible for performing normal border duties, training a local militia force, and fighting as a stay-behind guerrilla force if overrun in any conflict with China. The total strength of these two forces is approximately 20,000.

45. (S) The Special Frontier Force, with a strength of 8,000, is tasked to conduct unconventional warfare behind enemy lines. It is considered to be an elite force.

46. (S) Other paramilitary forces include the Central Reserve Police Force, the State Armed Police Forces, the Defence Security Corps and numerous other specialized organizations. Although these forces are organized generally along the military lines, they are less likely to come under the direct control of the Military.

PART IV - CONCLUSION (U)

47. (C) There is no sign that India will relinquish its goal of being the predominant Indian Ocean power in all respects. It can therefore be expected that Delhi will continue to devote major fiscal and material resources to the Military. Indeed, the recently elected Central Government of Prime Minister V.P. Singh, who is known to be a moderate, allowed defence spending to rise in its latest budget (Mar 90), despite an overall government budget deficit.

48. (C) The Indian Military is a very large and powerful force, manned by generally well-trained and motivated soldiers. It is equipped with some of the most modern military equipment available today. Although it has a number of major problems by Western standards, it compares very favourably with any other armed force in South Asia.

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