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CENTRAL ARMED POLICE FORCES IN INDIA: BETWEEN GROWTH AND VERSATILITY

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ABSTRACT

Composed of six specialised corps under the responsibility of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Central Armed Police Forces in India (CAPF) count in their ranks close to 980,000 men and women. Primarily responsible for border guarding, counter-terrorism, law enforcement, and counterinsurgency, the CAPF have seen their workforce and budget grow over the past twenty years. Particularly active in Kashmir, in the North-East, and in many central states afflicted by a Maoist rebellion, they are deployed wherever the Central State deems it necessary and where state police forces, more often than not understaffed, are overwhelmed. As the armed wing of the State and pillar of India's domestic security, the CAPF also intervene during natural disasters in order to rescue populations.

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INTRODUCTION

Since Independence, the Indian security apparatus has been based on two pillars: the army and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF). Affiliated to the Ministry of Home Affairs, and not to the Ministry of Defense, these forces have known major developments over the last two decades, and are now deployed in missions focusing on law enforcement, civil security or counterinsurgency in Kashmir, the North-East and the central states of the country. If some of their missions do resemble that of the French gendarmerie, they remain combatant forces with resources superior to those of the gendarmerie.

These armed police forces take part in increasingly diverse missions and their personnel has increased significantly: it has indeed doubled over the last two decades up to nearly a million men. This growth in workforce is six times faster than that of other central administrations.¹ Most of the growth of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs' budget is allocated to the CAPF,² which are led by Amit Shah, right-hand man of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and ideologue of Hindutva,³ the ruling party's ideology.⁴ The CAPF constitutes the main internal security structure of the Central State, by reinforcing the Union State's polices and guarding the borders. Understanding their role, evolution and actions, enables us to comprehend the political trajectory of the country.

Yet, despite their growing importance in terms of missions and personnel, the CAPF are one of least studied bodies of the Indian security apparatus. Direct and indirect sources on their organisation are rare, both because it is a subject considered relatively sensitive by the Indian government and because few researchers have taken an interest in it. Drawing on open source documents and press articles, as well as on available academic literature, this note aims to fill this gap.

First, we will present the CAPF, which are divided into six branches with distinct roles. We will then examine the reasons why India maintains such a force - notably for counterinsurgency and natural disaster preparedness missions.

1. Devesh Kapur, "[The Worrying Rise of Militarisation in India's Central Armed Police Forces](#)," *ThePrint* (blog), 29 November 2017.

2. Rahul Tripathi, "MHA Gets Rs 1.05 Lakh Crore; Emphasis on Police, Census," *Economic Times*, 2 February 2020.

3. India, understood as the country of the Hindus, and excluding the other communities inhabiting the country.

4. Christophe Jaffrelot, *L'Inde de Modi : national-populisme et démocratie ethnique*, Fayard, 2019.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CAPF

The CAPF in the Indian Security ecosystem

In 2011, the Indian government has grouped together six of these armed police forces under the name of Central Armed Police Forces. The CAPF directly report to the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Indian Union.⁵ The word “paramilitary” has not been used in the official nomenclature since that date, but nevertheless remains widely used both in everyday language and scientific literature.⁶ The use of such a word is often confusing for foreign audiences insofar as, outside of India, it more often than not designates illegal, illegitimate or non-official forces, without any clear hierarchical relationship to the ruling power. In India however, these forces all directly depend on the central civil authorities. The senior staff of the CAPF is, similarly to that of states police department, drawn from the Indian Police Service (IPS) recruitment examination.⁷ The Armed Police Forces are led by a police command rather than a military one.

BSF – Border Security Force	NDRF – National Disaster Response Force
CAPF – Central Armed Police Forces	NREGA – National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
CISF – Central Industrial Security Force	NSG – National Security Guards
CRDO – Coordination for Democratic Rights Organisation	RAF – Rapid Action Force
CRPF – Central Reserve Police Force	SAG – Special Action Group
IPS – Indian Police Service	SRG – Special Ranger Group
ITBP – Indo-Tibetan Border Police	SPO – Special Police Officer
LTE – Left Wing Extremism	SSB – Sashastra Seema Bal

Some of these armed police forces find their origins in the history of British India. The Assam Rifles for instance, were created as early as 1835 as a police force, while the East India Company was trying to expand its hold towards the North-East. It is the only force that still retains the title “paramilitary” in official texts.

For M. D. Sharma, Indian paramilitaries are agencies of the Ministries of Defense and Home Affairs, acting as auxiliaries to the armed forces while being considered a part of said armed forces.⁸ According to that definition, Sharma counts more than 1.5 million men and women enrolled in Indian paramilitaries in 2007. He indicates the existence of 12 paramilitary forces under different ministries and governments, and lists 11 that are assisted by two auxiliary services – although it is not quite clear whether the auxiliaries to the auxiliary

5. Nishit Dholabhai, “[For the Paramilitary, All’s in a New Name](#),” *The Telegraph*, 26 March 2011.

6. Some security specialists such as General Alain Lamballe, continue to use that particular word (Alain Lamballe, “L’Inde en quête de sécurité,” in Philippe Cadène and Brigitte Dumortier (eds.), *L’Inde : une géographie*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2015, p. 127-148).

7. This is actually contested within the CAPF (N.C. Asthana, “[Do IPS Officers Deserve to Head Paramilitary Forces?](#),” *The Wire*, 4 February 2020).

8. M. D. Sharma, *Paramilitary Forces of India*, Delhi, Kalpaz Pub, 2008.

forces are themselves considered paramilitaries or not. The diversity and complexity of the Indian security ecosystem are important.

Besides the 6 groups discussed at length in the next pages, M. D. Sharma identifies as “paramilitaries,” the coast guards whose supervisory authority is the Ministry of Defense. They are responsible for securing the Indian exclusive maritime zone and the coastlines, while the Indian Navy is entrusted with remote waters. The Prime Minister’s services have the authority on the Special Frontier Forces (SFF). The SFF are not particularly well known, and could be considered an equivalent of the “action service” for the Indian intelligence, and was originally made up of combatants recruited among Tibetans who fled the Chinese annexation. The Railway Protection Force, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Railways, is tasked with passengers’ security across the extensive Indian network. The Home Guards falls under the purview of the Union States’ governments. They are made up of volunteers serving as auxiliaries to the police forces and firefighters. Among the auxiliaries, Sharma identifies the Border Road Organisation and the National Cadet Corps. The former is a corps of engineers responsible for the construction and maintenance of roads accessible to motor vehicles, mainly in high mountain areas. The latter is less an auxiliary force than a youth organisation able to provide sporadic first aid assistance to civilians and also has an educational mission. Placed under the authority of the Ministry of Home Affairs without being considered members of the CAPF, the Rashtriya Rifles were created in 1990. Composed of elite soldiers recruited from the Indian army, the Rashtriya Rifles are meant to compensate the manpower shortage of the Kashmir police and are used to crush the rebellion in that state since their inception.

Apart from the police of the Union Territories, such as Delhi, which services are directed and supervised by the Ministry of Home Affairs, each Indian States has its own police services. However, Indian states have an insufficient ratio of police forces per capita: on average, it amounts to one police officer for 720 per inhabitant instead of one police officer for 520 inhabitants as prescribed by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. Moreover, India-wide police recruitment shows a deficit of 5.4 million men out of a total planned force of 22.2 million, or 24% deficit. Current members are poorly motivated, poorly trained and poorly armed.⁹ *The Economist* reports that their workday can amount up to 14 hours.¹⁰ Some of them are employed in fixed positions or in charge of the security of political personalities during their travels. This shortage of police officers is particularly significant in some states, such as Bihar, where the ratio of police officers for 100,000 inhabitants falls to 69, against a national average of 136.¹¹ The armed police forces can therefore be deployed in case regular police forces are overwhelmed by insurgencies or popular movement, as was the case in the Chhattisgarh state in the mid-2000s.

9. Beatrice Jauregui, *Provisional Authority: Police, Order, and Security in India*, Chicago/Londres, University of Chicago Press, 2016; TNN, “[India’s Ratio of 138 Police Personnel per Lakh of Population Fifth Lowest among 71 Countries](#),” *The Economic Times*, 13 July 2018; The Hans India, “[India Has Lowest Police Population Ratios in the World](#),” 29 July 2016.

10. Pish Cosh, “[India’s Police Are Overstretched, Poorly Trained and Politicised](#),” *The Economist*, 6 February 2020.

11. In France, this ratio is 390 for 100 000.

The Indian army counts 1,235,000 soldiers, while the entirety of the Central Armed Police Forces tallies around 980,000 members. The relationship between the CAPF and militaries are poorly known. Although occasionally deployed on the same field of operation, the CAPF men are less well-paid, less well-trained, and less well-equipped than their counterparts in the more traditional armed forces. However, it takes a certain degree of specialisation to tell the difference between military and CAPF, and Indians who do not pay attention to these kinds of details but indifferently call them soldiers (*jawans*).

How many divisions?

The Central armed police forces are numerous, diversified and specialized in their field of activity. Each one of them has its own hierarchy, schools and training centers.

- The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF): versatility and law enforcement

The CRPF corps forms the largest contingent of the CAPF with approximately 300,000 men and women divided into 246 battalions. Until the 1960s, the CRPF is, besides the Assam Rifles,¹² the only police corps at the federal level.¹³ It remained in charge of managing the border with Pakistan until 1965, with the creation of the Border Security Force (BSF). Its responsibilities are multiple. During wartime, the CRPF regiments have to maintain their positions, and in case of an invasion such as that in 1962, to raise a national resistance behind enemy lines.¹⁴

The CRPF has a 15-battalions law enforcement force, the Rapid Action Force (RAF), equipped, among other things, with tear gas. It is the members of the CRPF who normally intervene during community riots, such as that of Delhi in March 2020.¹⁵ The CRPF includes female battalions, used for instance to arrest potential female protestors to avoid scandals.¹⁶ It also takes on the majority of the counterinsurgency fighting against the Naxalites¹⁷ in

12. The Assam Rifles corps finds its origins in the Cachar Levy corps, founded by the British in 1835. It distinguished itself in Europe during the First World War and on the Birman frontlines during the Second. Its control was passed on from the Ministry of External Security to that of Internal Security in 1965. The "North-East Sentinels" are specialized in counterinsurgency and have to ensure the loyalty of the North-East inhabitants by demonstrating, in principle, Delhi's benevolence. Now composed of 64,000 men divided in 46 battalions, the Assam Rifles corps is entrusted with the protection of the India-Myanmar border since 2002. Despite being very close to the CAPF in regards to its missions, the Assam Rifles corps is considered as a paramilitary force by the Indian State and not as an armed police force, for mostly historical reasons.

13. Indians say « the center ».

14. The CRPF corps has suffered fire losses in 1959 during a Chinese border attack but also in 1962, 1965, and 1971.

15. PTI, "[Delhi Riots News: RAF Tackled over 300 Fire-Related Incidents](#)," *The Times of India*, 3 March 2020.

16. This gender division within law enforcement which does not have any equivalent in France, dates back to the colonial period. It was a matter of maintaining the colonial regime without shocking the public morality. The period witnesses both a strict gender division and a strong politicization and women participation in the fight against the colonial regime. Being a federal force, each corps is supposed to recruit 33% women. This ratio is effectively scarcely respected for multiple reasons.

17. Sandeep Avinash Prasanna, "Red Belt, Green Hunt, Gray Law: India's Naxalite-Maoist Insurgency and the Law of Non-International Armed Conflict," *UCLA Law Review*, 63, 2016, p. 485.

Kashmir, in the North-East and in the forests located in the centre of the country, along the “red belt.”¹⁸

Ten commando battalions specialised in jungle combat, the Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), were added to the force in response to the Naxalite movement.¹⁹ They are considered as elite troops by the official communication.

- The Border Security Force (BSF): India’s first line of defense

The Border Security Force (BSF) corps is made up of 260,000 men and women. Created in 1965, it is responsible with the security of the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders. Its 186 battalions include a small tonnage navy, which includes speedboats,²⁰ deployed along the 1,300 km of river border for which it is responsible. It also has a light aviation dedicated to transportation,²¹ and artillery regiments armed with mortars and 105 mm artillery.

In peacetime, the BSF is charged to protect the borders from infiltrations, to collect intelligence and to gain the trust of resident populations. In wartime, the BSF must hold its ground to allow the military forces large freedom of movement. About ten regiments are posted in the forests of the centre of the country²² for counterinsurgency missions. Some BSF are also deployed in Kashmir in counterinsurgency operations since the unrest began in 1989. The BSF prides itself on being the world’s largest border force in terms of troops. It is also equipped with a commando, “Creek Crocodiles,” specifically trained and equipped for difficult and swampy terrains such as the Gujarat and Pakistan.²³

The border between India and Bangladesh, which demarcation is complex and heavily militarised,²⁴ has separated what used to be a single region since 1947. The BSF deployed along this line shoot on sight on the Bangladeshis who cross a border marked almost entirely by barbed-wire fencing. We count about forty deaths every year on the Bengali side, despite the protests from both Dhaka,²⁵ and international NGOs such as the Human Right Watch.²⁶

- The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF): a force related to the country’s economy

Created in 1969 in order to protect national companies at a time where the economy was still half controlled by the state, the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) was responsible

18. The “red belt,” also called the “tribal belt” or “Naxalite belt” goes from West Bengal to Kerala in its maximum extension, but mainly covers, from the North-East to the South-West, the forest areas of Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. These are zones where the majority of the population belongs to the tribal categories of society. This area is plagued by a latent, sometimes bloody conflict between the mostly tribal Maoists (also called Naxalites), and the Indian State forces seeking to open their lands to mining exploitations or to defend the feudal agrarian structures. The Naxalite movement gets its name from the Naxalbari village in West Bengal, which rose up against land owners in the 1960s. See the map in Annex.

19. CRPF, “[Central Reserve Police Force](#),” n.d. (accessed 22 February 2020).

20. The navy branch of the BSF corps includes floating border posts and SHM shipcare speedboats. It is difficult to evaluate its actual importance, insofar as sources are scarce and unreliable.

21. The fixed wing aircraft fleet of the BSF Air Wing consists in an Embraer-135 J and an Avro (HS-748). The rotary wing aircraft fleet is composed of an ALH (Dhruv), a Cheetah and a Mi-17 1V.

22. See note 17.

23. BSF, “[Border Security Force](#),” n.d. (accessed 22 February 2020).

24. Shiv Sahay Singh, “[Half of India-Bangladesh Border Fenced](#),” *The Hindu*, 3 March 2017, sec. National.

25. Kadayam Subramanian, “[Human vs. National Security: Managing the Indo-Bangladesh Border](#),” *Asia Times* (blog), 14 July 2015; Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan, “[Border Killings Increase This Year, Says Foreign Minister](#),” *Dhaka Tribune*, 2 February 2020.

26. Human Right Watch, [India/Bangladesh: Indiscriminate Killings, Abuse by Border Officers](#),” 2010.

for the surveillance and the security of the sensitive infrastructures of the country. Now made up of 140,000 men, the CISF is still tasked with the protection of a large part of the governmental, industrial and urban infrastructure, which is very diverse and includes public federal buildings, power plants – including nuclear –, dams, ports and airports, Delhi's metro²⁷ and mining infrastructures. The latter are subject to special attention along the "red belt": the para-public company Eastern Coalfield Limited thus deploys 1,200 men from the CISF for the protection of its installations. This is to prevent the theft of coal and equipment, but also to guard against local mafia or Naxalites. Explosives depots are particularly monitored.²⁸ Some CISF are additionally specialised in firefighting.²⁹

India does not encourage the presence of private armed guards. For instance, private security companies are not allowed to arm their personnel if they do not already possess a license to carry a weapon. Since 2001, the CISF has offered its services to the private sector as a consultant in matters of security of goods and people, as well as in firefighting. This activity is now intended to finance its operating costs. As the only armed police force billing the private sector for its services, its financial autonomy is part of its communication. This is not without raising the question of force control. On the one hand, India can congratulate itself on relinquishing some of its financial obligations. On the other, the financial independence of such a large police force, in a country where corruption is so high³⁰ can pose a problem regarding the control of said force by the Ministry of Home Affairs. This situation can be explained by the fact that economic development, in other words, growth, is assimilated to a common good to be obtained as such.³¹ In a nutshell, the nation's interest is perceived by the Indian elite as identical to that of big companies. In this light, the line between public and private can be blurred, even when it regards an armed police force.

- The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP): trained for high altitudes

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police is a border police force created in 1962, following the Sino-Indian war. Under the principle "one border one force,"³² it is responsible for the border area between Tibet and India. Composed of nearly 90,000 men trained for very high mountain conditions, it is also known for its humanitarian and rescue interventions both in the Himalayas and across the rest of the territory.³³ Similarly to all other armed police

27. This concerns only the Delhi's metro network, of which some stations are nonetheless entrusted to the private sector. It should be pointed out that in India, every passenger is searched for each metro journey, and their belongings are x-rayed similarly to airports procedures. It is also the case when entering a shopping mall or a public building. It is however not the case for the train.

28. "[Eastern Coalfields Limited](#)," n.d. (accessed 2 April 2019).

29. CISF, "[Central Industrial Security Force, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India](#)," n.d. (accessed 2 April 2019). – The CISF corps is not intended to be a law enforcement force. However, in 2012, a protest took place at the electric power plant of Uri, in Kashmir. CISF men present at the time opened fire, killing two protesters. Five members of the CISF were arrested. The Prime Minister of the Jammu and Kashmir State asked that a trial take place, but the Ministry of Home Affairs noted that despite the fact that his men had not been deployed as part of a counter-insurgency mission, the Armed Force (Special Power) Act, a draconian law that guarantees that the actions of armed forces would not be subject to legal proceedings, should apply to them as well. As such, the armed forces must give their authorization for prosecution.

30. "[Transparency International - India](#)," n.d. (accessed 30 March 2020).

31. Michael Levien, "Special Economic Zones and Accumulation by Dispossession in India," *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 11:4, 2011.

32. Despite that principle, the BSF corps remains responsible for two borders at each end of the country.

33. ITBP, "[Indo-Tibetan Border Police](#)," 2019.

forces, the ITBP is a versatile force, engaged in both the counterinsurgency in Kashmir and in the security of eminent persons or Indian embassies abroad. At the beginning of the Covid-19 epidemic, the first quarantine camp in India was settled in an ITBP hospital and under its supervision around mid-March of 2020.³⁴

- The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB): tying the North-East to the subcontinent

The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), called the Special Service Bureau up until 2003, was created in 1963 with the aim of assisting Indian intelligence, and to stay behind and engage in guerrilla warfare in the case of another Sino-Indian war. As such, its senior staff has always been trained to jungle combat and to counterinsurgency tactics. The SSB had to play an intermediary role between civilians and militaries, and reinforce the national consciousness among the inhabitants of the North-West of India, whose loyalty Delhi doubted. The SSB would thus have contributed to stopping the incursions of Chinese military intelligence on the border area for which it was responsible.³⁵ In charge of supporting the external branch of the Intelligence Bureau until 1968, the SSB was attached to the Research and Analysis Wing, the Indian equivalent of the DGSE (*Direction générale de la Sécurité extérieure* – Directorate-General for External Security), when it was created. From 2001 onward, its attributions nevertheless normalise. Yet, even in 2017, 2,000 men were transferred to the Intelligence Bureau, which had become domestic intelligence, in order to reinforce the latter's territorial hold in the North-East.³⁶ The SSB now counts 80,000 men and women in its ranks. The Ministry of Home Affairs has nevertheless given its approval to increase the troops up to around 100,000 combatants. Since 2001, the SSB is responsible for the Indo-Nepalese and Indo-Bhutanese borders, in addition to being deployed in Kashmir, in the North-East, mainly in Manipur, along with central states of the country affected by the Maoist rebellion.³⁷

- The National Security Guard (NSG): the counterterrorism intervention

The National Security Guard, whose members are called “Black Cats” after the color of their uniforms, is the newest, smallest and the most specialized corps of the CAPF, with about 7,350 men.³⁸ The NSG was created in 1984, following *Operation Blue Star*, during which 10,000 men of the Indian Army, CRPF and BSF launched an assault on the Golden Temple of the Sikh, where pro-independence citizens were hiding. According to official estimates, the operations killed 500 people.³⁹

34. Astha Saxena, “Covid-19: ITBP Camp Set to Expand, Will Be Biggest Quarantine Centre in City,” *The Indian Express*, 15 March 2020.

35. India and China are still fighting over some areas in the North-West part of the country.

36. PTI, “Intelligence Bureau to Get 2,000 SSB Staffers as Govt Approves Border Snoop Plan,” *Livemint*, 7 September 2017, sec. politics.

37. SSB, “Sashastra Seema Bal,” 2019.

38. Hemant Singh, “National Security Guard: History, Functions and Operations,” *Jagranjosh.Com*, 26 September 2019.

39. Some of the Sikh in Punjab were demanding independence for their state, including through armed means. In 1984, their leader entrenched himself in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest place of the Sikh religion, and took some pilgrims hostage. The Indian Army, assisted by the CAPF, launched an attack from the 5th of June. They severely underestimated the weapon capacity and the training of the combatants entrenched in the temple and its neighborhood, who were equipped with anti-tank equipment such as Chinese RPG, likely supplied by the ISI, the Pakistani Intelligence. Around the same time, the Indian Army leads a large “clean-up” operation across Punjab. In protest of the Golden Temple attack, many Sikh resign from their public administration posts or desert their regi-

The NSG is composed of militaries and CAPF selected among the most promising elements, and recruited following particularly demanding tests. It is made up of two Special Action Groups (SAG) and three Special Ranger Groups (SRG).

The two SAGs are assault groups made up of soldiers seconded by the Ministry of Home Affairs, and trained for counter-terrorism and hostage-rescue operations. The three SRGs are composed of men coming from the CAPF and state polices. Until January 2020, part of the NSG was assigned to the protection of eminent persons, but this task should be transferred to the CRPF and CISF in order to reorient the commando forces towards their original mission.⁴⁰

They are mainly intervention commandos whose functions are comparable to that of the French National Gendarmerie Intervention Group (*Groupe d'intervention de la gendarmerie nationale - GIGN*). These two organisations do in fact maintain links with each other and organize skill-sharing events. Five members of the NSG went to France at the invitation of the GIGN in November 2019, and a GIGN delegation is scheduled to go to India in 2020.⁴¹ The NSG is not intended to replace the Central Armed Forces of Police in their traditional powers, but only to intervene in the event of terrorist attacks or in hostage-taking situations.

Here is a brief table summarizing the aforementioned forces.

Name	Number	Specialisation Area	Main Function
CRPF	300,000	All of India	Law Enforcement, counterinsurgency
BSF	260,000	Pakistani and Bengali Borders	Borders and counterinsurgency
CISF	140,000	All of India, cities and industries	Infrastructure Protection
ITBP	90,000	Indo-Tibetan border	Borders and counterinsurgency
SSB	100,000	North-East	Borders and counterinsurgency
NSG	7,350	All of India	Counter-terrorism

FORCES DEPLOYED ON ALL FRONTS

The CAPF are evolving and their capacities are increasing, with missions involving the use of force and protection missions. The Indian government wishes to ensure Delhi's power over the whole of the national territory. If there used to be a tendency to allow insurrections⁴² to grow due to local politics or apathetic governance in remote sectors of the country, the government does no longer hesitate to deploy its forces – a tendency that started

ments. Five months later, Indira Gandhi, India's Prime Minister, is murdered by her Sikh bodyguards. The ensuing pogroms kill 3,000 people in Delhi. The outcome of Operation Blue Star is judged particularly severely as a failure of the Indian Intelligence and its intervention capability against hostage-takers on its territory.

40. PTL, "[Government Decides to Withdraw NSG from VIP Security Duties](#)," *The Economic Times*, 12 January 2020.

41. Embassy of France India, "[NSG Hosted by GIGN in France for Anti-Hijacking Cooperation](#)," La France en Inde/France in India, 18 November 2019.

42. Thomas Francis Lynch III, "[India's Naxalite Insurgency: History, Trajectory, and Implication for U.S.-India Security Cooperation on Domestic Counterinsurgency](#)," *Strategic Perspectives*, 22, Genève, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2016.

prior to the election of Narendra Modi, and that has only grown since. Both in its states and abroad, the government extends its soft power through, among other things, humanitarian interventions. India can thus present itself as the net-security provider that the country aspires to be. The CAPF are responsible for the protection of the population in the face of disasters – which are more often than not, environmental in the case of India –, thus allowing the deployment of traditional armed forces during interventions in the countries of the sub-region. Once again, the role of the CAPF and armed forces are complementary.

Counterinsurgency and draconian laws

The CAPF are necessary for missions that do not require the involvement of the army, or in which the deployment of traditional armed forces risks posing political, legal or strategic issues.

It is the case, for instance, during the relatively frequent inter-community riots between Hindus and Muslims, in which the CAPF are becoming increasingly biased.⁴³ The historian Omar Khalidi⁴⁴ suggests that the relative partiality of the CAPF during the inter-religious riots in which they intervened can be explained by their own Hindu religious homogeneity. The most spectacular operations in which the CAPF are involved however, remain those related to counterinsurgency.

India has been subject, for more than forty years, to dissident – sometimes separatist – movements, some of which practice terrorism. The CAPF have thus evolved alongside these threats. Three zones of the Indian national territory are still prey to major unrest: 1) Kashmir, 2) the North-East, in particular Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, and part of the Arunachal Pradesh,⁴⁵ and 3) the states of the “Naxalite belt,” the Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. In these two latter zones, the unrest is being deescalated.

In Kashmir and in the North-East border zone, the government has implemented the AFSPA law, *Armed Forces (Special Power) Act*, which authorises military personnel such as the CAPF to arrest any individual deemed suspicious, to search any house, vehicle, or person, and even to open fire on civilians without fear of any legal repercussions. Non-Governmental Organisations have shown for years that this law enables all kinds of abuses, including sexual violence and summary executions, without however, succeeding in having it repealed. Its proponents however, underline that it enables military and police forces to act according to the urgency of the matter without fear of legal consequences regarding their actions against Indian civilians insofar as the army has to give its consent before any prosecution can take place. The army excludes intervention without this legislative cover. The AFSPA has been in effect in the North-East since 1958 and in Kashmir since 1990

43. Pish Cosh, “[India’s Police Are Overstretched, Poorly Trained and Politicised.](#)”

44. Omar Khalidi, *Khaki and Ethnic Violence in India: Army, Police and Paramilitary Forces During Communal Riots, Gurgaon/Haryana, Inde, Three Essays Collectives*, 2nd revised edition, 2010.

45. These States are often referred to as “North East,” or the “Seven Sisters,” after the seven States that compose the region. It should be noted that the problematics in these States are not necessarily the same and do not share the same temporality. Manipur, for instance was integrated to the Indian Union in 1949 without prior consultation. A fraction of the population has long demanded autonomy. In neighboring Nagaland, it is the Naga’s independentism that opposed the Indian State.

at the start of the insurgency. Implemented during the separatist unrests in Punjab and Chandigarh,⁴⁶ it has been lifted since. It is also being lifted gradually in the northeastern sectors in which violence has stopped.⁴⁷

The counterinsurgency activities of the CAPF have thus started as early as 1950. Several action doctrines have been tested. In regards to some of them, it is legitimate to ask whether the intention was to solve a public order issue, a political communication endeavour, or to profit from the unrest. As such, in the mid-2000, the Chhattisgarh state implemented the *Salwa Judum* movement, or “purification hunt,” which it presented as a spontaneous insurgency from the populations against the exactions committed by the Maoist insurgents. Villages where Naxalites were welcome were moved towards camps and the government armed the tribal inhabitants of the region, sometimes former Naxalites, with the promise of a lifetime job as *Special Police Officer* (SPO). At the same time, the men of the Central Reserve Police Force were deployed *en masse* alongside these SPOs in order to forcibly recapture the ground from the Naxalites, even as career police officers considered the SPO as expendable and replaceable. The relationships between the CAPF and the SPOs were poor throughout the entire operation.

India’s counterinsurgency doctrine,⁴⁸ suffered a major setback during that operation. The *Salwa Judum* became a counter-example for counterinsurgency operations, so much has it increased violence and given moral and tactical victory to the Naxalites, this time rightly perceived as resistance fighters against corrupt politicians using local and federal forces to cover the territory. The operation, disastrous from the point of view of justice and law enforcement, nevertheless allowed the important enrichment of a class of corrupt local politicians and unscrupulous industrialists. The local Indian elite, often the intermediary between the business world and that of politics, allowed public and private companies mining concessions, thus forcing farmers to give up their lands under the threat of an arrest by the CRPF. The internal dynamics within the villages, the conflicts between landlords and landless agricultural workers, and the return of village chiefs who had previously lost their authority to the Maoists, allowed the *Salwa Judum* operation to know the success it did from the perspective of mining operations, local politicians, and the State’s business sectors. It should be indeed noted that the “violence of the counterinsurgency cleansed rich mineral areas from their populations, thus allowing, in the name of “bringing peace,” an exploitation free of the delays that acquiring tribal land would bring if pursued through legal channels.”⁴⁹ The Supreme Court condemned the arming of tribal youths by the Chhattisgarh state and put an end to the *Salwa Judum*, without however ordering that

46. The urban zone holds the Union Territory status and served as capital of Penjab and Haryana from 1983 to 1997.

47. The government has, however, refused to implement the AFSPA in the areas affected by Naxalites violence, deeming that the remoteness of borders and the lack of separatism did not justify the intervention of military forces. The latter does not, in fact, seem particularly inclined to intervene in the heart of the Indian territory, judging that the matter is mostly a social and political issue. In addition, the involvement of the military on such a large terrain would risk dissolving their forces, all the while harming the sympathy they have gained among the populations, insofar as part of it views the Naxalites in a favorable light.

48. Bibhu Prasad Routray, “[India: Fleeting Attachment to the Counterinsurgency Grand Strategy](#),” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28:1, 2017, p. 57-80.

49. Jason Miklian, “The Purification Hunt: The Salwa Judum Counterinsurgency in Chhattisgarh, India,” *Dialectical Anthropology*, 33:3, 2009, p. 441-459.

the implementation of these decisions be verified.⁵⁰ The corruption of the local and national elite remains one of the most powerful drivers for violence.⁵¹

In the states of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh, the CAPF are thus accused of embezzlement, summary executions and rapes since the intervention *en masse* of federal forces in the 1990s.⁵² Civil rights organisations point out that the Advasis, the majority ethnic group in the forests of the “Naxalite belt,” are Indian citizens even if they are not Hindus, and that executions of civilians are not desirable in a democracy.

Nandini Sundar⁵³ points out that the insurgency forced the State to take an interest in these so far neglected zones, and paradoxically led it to strengthen its presence there beyond the security aspect. Maoists thus forced teachers into occupying the positions for which they were paid and reduced the corruption among local officials – although not without levying a tax themselves.⁵⁴ Without exaggerating that success, it should nevertheless be acknowledged that part of the rhetoric and of the successful management of the Maoists rested on a criticism of the state’s absence and of the justice’s partiality.

In 2016, 116 battalions from the various CAPF trained in counterinsurgency were deployed in the 10 central states of the country in counterinsurgency operations with aerial assets that included drones and Indian Air Force helicopters. The Naxalite insurgency that then Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, qualified in 2009 to be “India’s greatest internal threat” has indeed not yet been extinguished.⁵⁵ It is nonetheless true that the situation on the ground has improved markedly, both as a result of the strong interventions of the CAPF and of the political choices to fight against extreme poverty.

50. Nandini Sundar, *The Burning Forest: India’s War in Bastar*, Delhi, Juggernaut, 2016; Supreme Court of India, “[Nandini Sundar & Ors. Versus State of Chattisgarh](#),” 2011.

51. This local appropriation of resources should not be necessarily perceived as contradictory with economic growth, which remains the primary objective of national policies.

52. It is at least the thesis developed by Nandini Sundar (“Beyond the Bounds? Violence at the Margins of New Legal Geographies,” in Nancy Lee Peluso et Michael Watts (eds.), *Violent Environments*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001, and *The Burning Forest: India’s War in Bastar*, and Amita Baviskar (“Written on the Body, Written on the Land: Violence and Environmental Struggles in Central India” in Nancy Lee Peluso and Michael Watts (eds.), *Violent Environments*, p. 354-379). It is also the conclusions that can be drawn from numerous reports written by non-governmental organisations and human rights observers on the violence committed in the center of the country (PUDR, “War and the Lightness of Being Adivasi, Security Camps and Villages in Bijapur, Chattisgarh,” Delhi, People’s Union for Democratic Rights, 2015 and “Encounters, Position Paper XXIV Ramanadham Memorial Meeting,” APCLC & PUDR, 2009; CDRO, “[Faking An Ecounter: Killing the Peace Process](#),” 2010, “[Report of The Killing of Adivasis by CRPF Forces in Bijapur District, Chattisgarh](#),” 2012, “Who Is the State Hunting? Incidents of Massacre by Security Forces and Salwaa Judum under Operation Green Hunt, in Bijapur and Dantewada Districts of Chhattisgarh,” 2012, “[Living in the Shadow of Terror People’s Lives and Security Operations in Jharkhand](#),” 2013, “[Fake Encounters in Odisha, How the State Picks, Arrests and Kills Its ‘Maoists’](#),” 2013; PUCL, “Loot of the Land, Livelihood and Life, a Joint Fact Finding into Incidents of Crime against People in Odisha,” People’s Union for Civil Liberties (Odisha), Organisation for Protection of Democratic Rights (Andhra Pradesh), Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (West Bengal), Human Rights Forum (Andhra Pradesh), Campaign for Justice and Peace (Tamilnadu), Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (Andhra Pradesh), Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (Delhi), 2011, “[Anything Goes... In the Name of National Security Story of Soni Sori](#),” Saheli, Peoples Union for Civil Liberties, Peoples Union for Democratic Rights and Women Against Sexual Violence and State Repression, 2012; Human Right Watch, “[‘Being Neutral Is Our Biggest Crime’ Government, Vigilante, and Naxalite Abuses in India’s Chhattisgarh State](#),” 2008).

53. Nandini Sundar, *The Burning Forest: India’s War in Bastar*.

54. Jason Miklian, “The Purification Hunt: The Salwa Judum Counterinsurgency in Chhattisgarh, India.”

55. Rahi Gaikwad, “[Manmohan: Naxalism the Greatest Internal Threat](#),” *The Hindu*, 11 October 2009, sec. National.

Humanitarian Interventions

“What are armed forces for?” That question isn’t solely asked in Europe.⁵⁶ Indian armed forces, including the CAPF, have seen their rescue and disaster relief missions (Human Assistance and Disaster Relief – HADR) take a much more central place within their operations. This importance only increases with the country’s adaptation to climate change, which in India takes the form of disaster preparedness, which includes increasingly intense monsoons.

Former career soldiers Abhijit Singh⁵⁷ and Pradeep Chauhan,⁵⁸ note with concern that a growing part of the budget and human resources of the Indian armies is deployed in HADR operations. Neither of them mentions the yet crucial role of the armed police in this matter – no doubt because of a certain disdain among the professional military for such services. The CAPF are also the ones called upon to protect dams and water reservoirs against theft during the droughts that hit the country with increasing frequency.⁵⁹

The 1999 “super cyclone” in Odisha caused the death of more than 10,000 people. After that event, the government implemented the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), which centralizes and prepares the national evacuation and response plans to respond to crises. The NDRF deploys and trains three regiments of the CRPF and BSF, and two regiments each of the CISF, SSB and ITBP. The NDRF answers directly to the Prime Minister and ensures a solid chain of command insofar as it can mobilise rapidly and efficiently different type of forces.⁶⁰ When the cyclone Fani brought about the same conditions as the 1999 “super cyclone,” the CAPF and the local forces of the affected states, formed and supervised by the NDRF, successfully managed the evacuation of a million and a half people in Odisha. The death toll amounted to about 80 people. If that success was not unblemished – lower castes members were left out of the shelters –,⁶¹ on the whole, the NDRF nevertheless presents an impressive record – although no fundamental effort to reduce the populations’ vulnerability has been made.

The rise of the CAPF can also be seen as an increase of the State’s means dedicated to face environmental disasters. It is about building a resilient, centralised and reliable relief and response capacity. At the same time, however, these forces watch over the Indian economic development, without putting into questions their social and environmental impacts. Yet, the latter are responsible for pushing the populations and infrastructures to the limits of their resilience.

56. Timothy Edmunds, “What Are Armed Forces For? The Changing Nature of Military Roles in Europe,” *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), 82:6, 2006, p. 1059-1075.

57. Abhijit Singh, “Climate Change and Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region,” *Journal of Defence Studies*, 9:1, 2015, p. 63-82.

58. Pradeep Chauhan, “[Concerning the Impact of Climate Change on India’s Security](#),” *Policy Briefs*, New Delhi, Inde, Ananta Aspen Centre, 2018.

59. Agence France-Presse, “[Armed Guards at India’s Dams as Drought Grips Country](#),” *The Guardian*, 2 May 2016, sec. World news.

60. “[NDRF](#),” National Disaster Response Force, 2019.

61. Prabhash Kumar Dutta, “[Denied Entry in Shelter Homes during Cyclone Fani, Say Dalits in Odisha](#),” *India Today*, 17 May 2019.

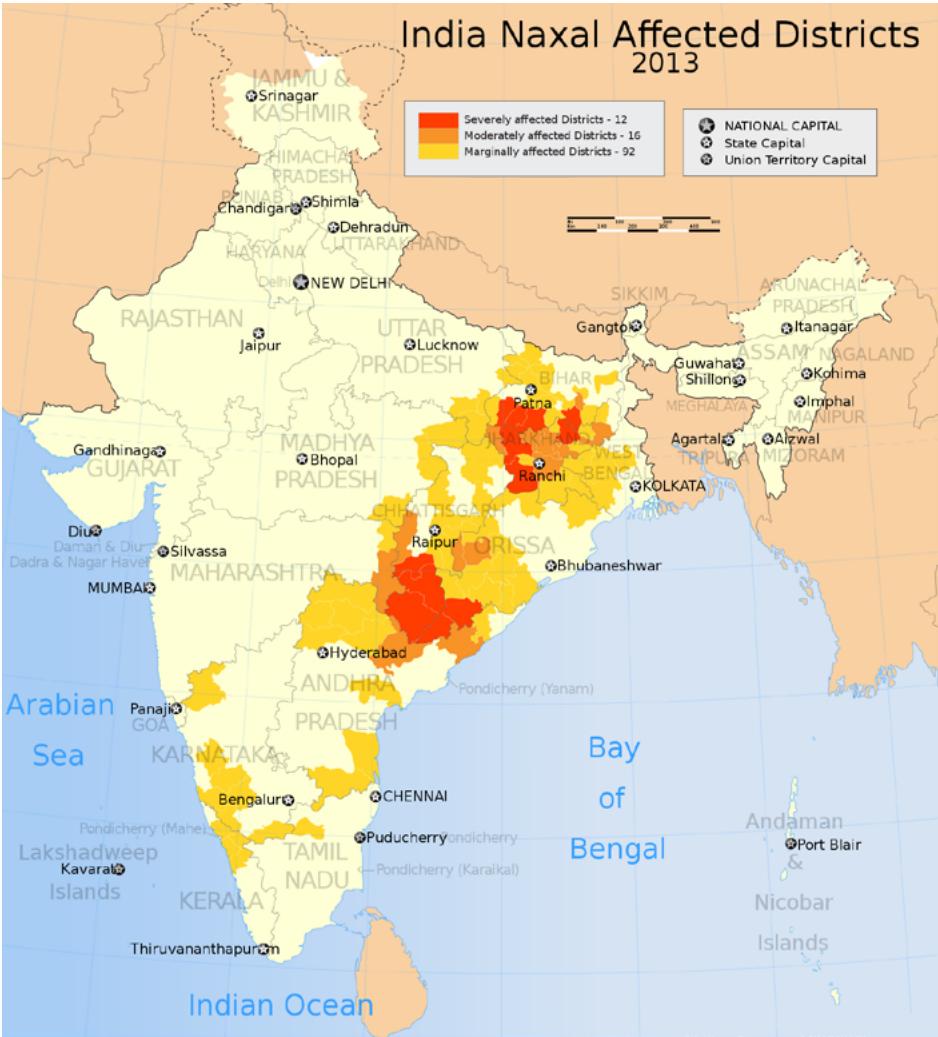
CONCLUSION

The rise of the CAPF can therefore be interpreted in several ways. The assertion of this force in India can be seen as strengthening the armed wing of the Central State. On the one hand, it responds strongly to multiple insurgencies (“the Naxalite belt,” Nagaland, Kashmir). On the other, it reinforces the Central police compared to the forces of the states New Delhi does not necessarily trust to handle and solve security issues. The rather unexpected multiplication of protests in favour of protecting the Indian Constitution since December 2019 led to the deployment of the CRPF in cities, although the pressure in Kashmir has not eased. In the context of increasing inter-religious and inter-communal tensions in contemporary India, it is particularly important to observe the evolution and the increase of disciplined, armed forces, which are largely committed to the ruling party under the direction of the right-hand man of the Prime Minister.

Steven Wilkinson,⁶² reckons that the CAPF deserve credit for limiting the role and growth of the army since India’s Independence in 1947. According to him, it helped protect the Indian State against *coups* that affected most of the recently decolonized countries. These forces have thus been paramount to the continuity of the Indian parliamentary democracy. Wilkinson sees in the CAPF a force capable to take action on the territory without deploying the army, with the risk of being unable to limit their involvement in the political sphere. On the contrary, the presence of multiple insurrectional clusters seventy years after the country’s independence can also be seen as a failure of India’s democracy to put an end to the worse of poverty and to give a voice to a part of its nationals in the conduct of state affairs. The deployment of the CAPF against insurgencies and the use of draconian laws in the North-East and Kashmir are also the symbol of these failures.

(Translation by Florie Longuépée)

62. Steven I. Wilkinson, *Army and Nation: the Military and Indian Democracy since Independence*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2015.



Indian Districts affected by the Naxalite rebellion in 2013.

(© M. Tracy Hunter, India Maoist Conflict Map, Institute for Conflict Management, 2014.)

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