

Educating the Professional Military: Civil–Military Relations and Professional Military Education in India

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Abstract

This article analyzes the ways in which civil–military relations shape professional military education (PME). Its main argument is that military education benefits from a civil–military partnership. In doing so, the article examines the role of civil–military relations in shaping PME in India. While describing the evolution of military education in India, it analyzes its weaknesses and argues that this is primarily due to its model of civil–military relations, with a limited role for civilians. Theoretically, this argument challenges Samuel Huntington’s notion of “objective control”—which envisaged a strict separation between the civil and military domains. Conceptually, this article argues for a greater dialogue on military education among civilians, both policy makers and academics, and military officers and not to leave it to the military’s domain—as is currently the practice in most countries.

Keywords

civil–military relations, military effectiveness, professional military education, Indian military, defense policy

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What role, if any, should civilians play in shaping professional military education (PME)? This article engages with this topic and argues that civilian intervention and a civil–military partnership is crucial to the development of PME. In doing so, the article examines the role of civil–military relations in shaping PME in India. This is a topical issue with an ongoing debate generated by the imminent establishment of an Indian National Defence University (INDU). India’s experience and the broader conceptual arguments about PME should therefore be instructive for countries that are at various stages of establishing defense universities and anticipates a growing trend of ties between civilian universities and military educational institutions (Libel, 2016). In addition, as one of the few post-colonial democracies with firm civilian control, India offers insights into countries struggling with, or recovering from, praetorian rule. PME has also fetched attention in democratizing countries due to its ability to embed democratic norms and is considered a core subfield of security sector reforms. Insights from this article therefore apply for PME in other countries—both developed and developing.

The main conceptual argument put forward in this article is that effective PME requires *informed and well-intentioned* civilian intervention arising from a civil–military partnership. Effective PME, as discussed later, refers to a system that is geared toward education and not training and intellectually prepares military officers to deal with future uncertainty. “Informed” civilian intervention is meant to emphasize that civilians need to know about the purpose and system of military education. Such knowledge comes from partnering with the military. The term “well-intentioned” is used to differentiate instances of civilian intervention that is motivated by either enhancing military effectiveness or for building better coherence between military means and political purposes. As discussed later, such types of interventions have occurred in countries like the United States and United Kingdom, among others. At the same time, the article cautions against the dangers of parochial or ideologically motivated civilian intervention that can hurt military professionalism.

The argument that civilians should help shape military education has important implications for the theory of civil–military relations. It challenges Samuel Huntington’s notion of “objective control” which assumed that military autonomy maximizes its effectiveness. Instead, military autonomy in PME may not be desired, as the military is more likely to focus on training instead of education. In this regard, Janowitz’s (1960, pp. 428–429) ideas turned out to be more prescient when while observing that “most military schools remain service oriented,” he called for a more broad-based approach to military education. Such a sentiment of “broadening military education” is supported by more recent scholarship (Warren, 2015).

There are two main arguments emerging from this study of PME in India. First, civilians have had almost no role in shaping it—either as policy makers or as professional educators. To be sure, the Ministry of Defence, almost exclusively staffed by civilians, has some financial controls and their approval is required for creating a new facility, like setting up a war college, or for additional budgetary

outlays. However, civilians have not used their powers to shape the content or process of military education. Second, as PME has been left almost entirely to the services, the military has tended to focus more toward training and operations and not on education. This omits the kind of broad-based education needed by senior military leaders at the strategic level of warfare.

At the outset, it is important to differentiate between military education and training—a nuance missed by most (Johnson-Freese, 2012, pp. 136–138). The U.S. Joint Staff defines education as learning that focuses on “the cognitive domain and fosters breadth of view, diverse perspectives, critical analysis, abstract reasoning, comfort with ambiguity and uncertainty, and innovative thinking, particularly with respect to complex, non-linear problems” (U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009, pp. A-1 and A-2). Training, on the other hand, focuses on technical skills “designed to deliver discrete, well-defined knowledge and skill sets essential to performance of specific tasks/jobs” (U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009, p. C-3). To illustrate, education would instruct a commander to handle organizational change, strategy, and policy, whereas training would impart the necessary technical skills to effectively operate hardware. According to oft repeated colloquialism, “one trains for certainty whereas education is for handling uncertainty.” This article examines military education, not training. Admittedly, differentiating training from education is easier said than done—and there is a “cognitive tension or dissonance” between the two (Gleiman & Zacharakis, 2016; Metz, 2013). However, focusing on the curricular content and the qualifications of the faculty, civilian and military, provides some insights into whether the focus is on training or education. This is the approach taken in this article.

The article begins by examining the characteristics that constitute an effective system for PME. Next it explains the conceptual rationale, based on Clausewitz, for civilian intervention and involvement in military education. Thereafter, it examines civilian motivation for intervening in military education and discusses case studies including the United States and United Kingdom. The following section describes the evolution of PME in India. Next, it analyzes weaknesses in its system of PME. The penultimate section cautions against the danger of ill-advised or ill-motivated civilian intervention. The conclusion lists some of the larger implications of this article and identifies avenues for future research. It is important to note that at junior officer levels, it is appropriate for PME to focus on tactical competence and for the balance between education and training to shift toward the latter. The arguments in this article therefore apply mainly, but not exclusively, for education at war colleges. The methodology consists of primary interviews combined with secondary research and has gained from access to less widely circulated documents on PME in India.

Designing an Effective System for PME

How can we differentiate between an effective and a weak program of PME? First is the provision for civilian faculty. It is essential that civilian faculty function as core

members for the provision of PME. Only then can military officers potentially get a well-rounded education. It is more likely that civilian faculty would be able to challenge prevailing organizational narratives and instill the habits of critical thinking and intellectual curiosity in their students. Without this provision, the faculty would usually consist of military officers' most likely serving on a rotational basis. This is problematic for a number of reasons. Military officers are essential for teaching subjects related to military operations; however, they are rarely in a position to teach nonmilitary subjects. As a result, the curricula, the importance of which is discussed later, would probably lean more toward training than education. In addition, it would be difficult for a serving officer in the faculty to challenge organizational myths and narratives and therefore even harder to instill critical thinking skills in their students.

The second important characteristic of a strong PME relates to curricula development. Simply put, PME should focus on subjects that instill critical thinking skills—a commonly cited goal (Barno, Bensahal, Kidder, & Sayler, 2013; Wilton Park, 2013). This is easier said than done. Perhaps the only way to do so is to broaden the horizon of the military and inform them about larger political, social, organizational, and economic considerations (Rapp, 2015). PME should therefore be focused more toward statecraft, diplomacy, international relations, domestic and international law, and organizational theory, among other topics. According to Wakelam (2016, p. 60), to achieve its goals, military education becomes a “largely intellectual action” that “requires more liberal education than it does training.” Necessarily, the curricula should also include study of military history, essential to the intellectual development of the officer cadre (Evans, 1997). However, most militaries are suspicious of what they consider dated historical knowledge and are more interested in applied knowledge attached to the concept of a “usable past” (Carter, 2010). As a result, if curricula development is left to the military, one would expect to see less of an emphasis on military history.

Table 1 summarizes the desired characteristics for an effective PME. To enhance professionalism, military education needs to be grounded in two things: operational realities and academic freedom. Military practitioners must work alongside academics to enhance curricula development. The education component is best provided by developing a partnership between professional military leaders and civilian academics. PME needs to be developed from both perspectives—and not one at the expense of the other.

The best way forward then is the idea of a *civil–military partnership*, wherein civilians (policy makers and academicians) work together with the military leadership to enhance PME. This is one of the main ideas put forward in this article, but it is a very tentative one requiring further research. The crucial role of civilians has been acknowledged by others. As Kennedy and Nielson (2002, p. xi) argue, “one of the key points brought to light here is the indispensable role of civilian educators in pointing the military in the right direction and being a vital part of any successful process.” However, as discussed in the next section, civilians rarely intervene on this issue.

Table 1. Characteristics of an Effective PME.

Characteristics	Effective PME	Weak PME
Faculty	Civilian faculty function as core members of PME institutes	No such provision
Curricula development and focus	Apart from operations, education is geared toward broader subjects related to statecraft, diplomacy, and the use of force including international relations, organizational theory, area studies, constitutional law, military history, and security studies	Primarily focused on training and operations

Forging the Sword: Civilian Intervention and PME

PME in most countries is usually considered to be in the exclusive domain of the military. This is primarily due to norm and a lack of expertise. By norm, the military usually controls PME. This should not be surprising in countries where the military is a politically powerful actor. However, this is also the case in countries with strong civilian control. For instance, in the United States, the Skelton panel reforms that reshaped military education was the “first comprehensive congressional review of PME in the 200-year history of the Congress” (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1997/2005, p. 303). Another factor that works against civilian involvement in PME is the lack of expertise. As few civilians possess the experience and the knowledge of military affairs, therefore in most countries (with the exception of some in Europe), the content, structure, and conduct of PME are left to the military.

This seems entirely in keeping with Huntington’s preferred model of “objective control”—that envisaged a strict separation between the civilian and military domains. Huntington assumed that granting military autonomy over its own “domain” will maximize its effectiveness (Huntington, 1957, pp. 83–85; Nielsen, 2005).¹ “The essence of objective civilian control,” Huntington (1957) writes, “is the recognition of an autonomous military professionalism” (p. 83). Following this logic, military education therefore should only concern military leaders.²

However, objective control has its share of critics. Schadow and Lacquement (2009, p. 114) dismiss it as an “abstract construct” that “unduly narrows the focus of military leaders to operations and tactics . . . [and] would direct the military’s attention away from strategy and the concepts of victory that link military actions to overarching national policy aims.” There is indeed a strong notion that military education should inform officers about political objectives and help in “developing strategic mindedness” (Rapp, 2015, p. 14). Kohn (1997) captures another set of criticism that the objective control model “decreases civilian control over military affairs” (p. 143). Perhaps a more fundamental challenge has come from scholars like

Posen (1984) and E. Cohen (2002) who have shown how civilian intervention is, at times, necessary for military effectiveness.

The main theoretical justification for civilian “interference” to shape military education comes from Clausewitz’s (1976) famous dicta: “policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political” (p. 605). If war is fought for political purposes, then military officers—at the operational and strategic level—must be well acquainted with the larger political goal. Nielsen’s (2001) reading of Clausewitz argues, “at the highest levels, the idea of a purely military opinion . . . does not make sense,” and instead it is imperative that senior officers have a “thorough understanding of national policy and act accordingly” (pp. 17–18). Binkley (2016) specifically repudiates objective control based on a close study of Clausewitz. Moreover, in a democracy, it is even more vital that civilians should retain the right to shape officer education and thereby officer perceptions. If instead this function is left entirely at the discretion of the military, then it *may* adopt militaristic or even antidemocratic views.

Civilian Motivation for Intervening in PME

There are many potential drivers for civilian policy makers to intervene in PME. It offers a powerful tool to shape perspectives within the military. Another reason could be to save financial resources by forcing the services to consolidate their training and education activities. In addition, it could be in response to demographic change, alliance pressures, and emergence of epistemic communities or in response to pressures to attain university accreditation—as has happened in Europe and elsewhere (Libel, 2016, pp. 15–16; Paile, 2010). Finally, it could be aimed at enhancing military effectiveness. While all these drivers are important, and not necessarily mutually exclusive, this article focuses on the aspect of military effectiveness as the primary justification for civilian involvement.

That PME is an important factor in military effectiveness is widely accepted in the literature (Brooks, 2007, p. 22; Toronto, 2015). According to Holder and Murray (1998), “the history of military innovation and effectiveness in the last century suggests a correlation between battlefield performance and how seriously military institutions regarded officer education” (p. 90). Due to this relationship, civilians have justified “intervening” in what has traditionally been considered the military’s domain. Civilian ability to influence military education has played out differently in different countries—indicative of the political power of civilians and the military. However, in the 1990s, the advent of jointness—the ability of the three services to operate together—has provided the main intellectual justification for civilian intervention to reshape military education. This comes across clearly in the subsequent discussion of case studies.

Civilian intervention and partnership of the kind argued for in this article has been most pronounced in the case of the U.S. The Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986 and

subsequently the Ike Skelton Committee on PME in 1989 dramatically transformed the U.S. military, especially with respect to joint education (U.S. House of Representative Committee Report, 1989). These civilian-led initiatives however faced considerable opposition. The military feared a loss of power and the “individual services fought to maintain their autonomy even though the overall defense system suffered in terms of effectiveness” (Bruneau, 2013, p. 198). However, civilians in the legislative branch, in partnership with reformist military officers—serving and retired—and the executive branch forcefully intervened in what was previously considered the military’s domain to change military education. To a considerable extent, they were helped in this endeavor by the efforts in the early 1970s of Vice Admiral Stansfield Turner—who transformed curriculum and education in the Naval War College (Johnson-Freese, 2013, pp. 5–6). By the 1990s, jointness emerged as the primary intellectual justification for civilian intervention in reshaping military education. One of the architects of Goldwater-Nichols reforms, Arch Barret, admitted that they viewed “changes in education as the means to change the culture of the organization of the U.S. armed forces” (quoted in Bruneau, 2013, p. 199).

As a result of these interventions, there were a number of changes in military education. First, the Goldwater-Nichols Act strengthened the office of the Joint Chiefs. The Joint Staff, in turn, reshaped PME by ensuring that all military education institutions adhere to the Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP). This policy document serves as a guiding document for military education and is revised periodically. Second, the Skelton committee emphasized the importance of civilian faculty singling out the Naval War College for praise and calling their civilian faculty “especially noteworthy” (U.S. House of Representative Committee Report, 1989, p. 147). A major recommendation of this committee was for “amending present law to facilitate hiring civilian faculty” (U.S. House of Representative Committee Report, 1989, p. 3; Stiehm, 2002, p. 174). Gradually, this led to an increase in quality and quantity of civilian faculty at all the war colleges. Third, the process of accreditation—both to the joint staff and civilian institutions of higher education, for grant of degrees at PME institutions—forced greater academic rigor and standardization. As war colleges became degree-granting institutions, this forced them to pay attention to the demands of civilian institutions of higher education and emulate civilian graduate schools. Fourth, these developments led to a growing civil–military partnership in the field of PME. This becomes evident when examining curricula development—a process shaped by the OPMEP and the deliberations of the Military Education Coordination Committee—composed of representatives (both civilian and military) of the different war colleges.

To be sure, there is still some criticism of the American system of military education. However, the scale of the problems and the issues that they face appear to be of a different magnitude, in comparison to PME in other countries (Lamb & Porro, 2015; U.S. House of Representatives Committee Report, 2010). Significantly, for the main argument made in this article, those calling for reform of

military education are in favor of greater civilian involvement (Kelley & Johnson-Freese, 2014).

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, civilians in partnership with reformist military officers were at the forefront of efforts to reshape military education. In 1997, they overcame opposition from the services and combined their single service staff colleges into a Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC). The 1998 Strategic Defence Review emphasized the creation of “modern forces” to meet future challenges—a euphemism for enhancing military effectiveness (UK Ministry of Defence, 1998, p. 10). This emphasis was stressed upon by the *Defence Training Review*, undertaken in 1999. The review was conducted by an integrated team of civilians and military officers. Its report aimed at reforming military education and training with the assumption that the military needs to “shift to joint, multinational and inter-Agency operations” (UK Defence Training Review, 2001, p. 6). This led to the establishment of the Defence Academy in April 2002. As a result, the services no longer had exclusive control over military education and it led to a much greater role for civilians.

Perhaps equally important were the efforts at partnering academics and universities with military education. Till the 1980s, “the number of academic specialists in defense and strategy was small” (Freedman, 2016, p. 109). However, in the 1990s, Kings College was given the contract to provide academic support to the new JSCSC. This arrangement was further strengthened with the “partnerships between the Defence Academy and both Cranfield [University] and King’s College . . . to provide the academic content” (Kiszley, 2004, p. 37). This created a demand for civilian faculty for PME. In addition, as Kings College and Cranfield University grant accreditation for PME, this forced the military to work with academics and educators like never before. As a result, they cooperate and consult closely together on the issue of curricula development (interview, Geoffrey Till, November 11, 2016). According to Utting (2009, pp. 311–315), the all-round improvement in military education occurred due to a partnership between civilians, including officials in the Defence Ministry and academicians and the military.

In sum, in these two countries, civilians have intervened in PME, and currently civilian academics play a prominent role. There is also varying levels of civilian intervention in other democracies, like Canada and Australia (Peterson, 2012). The motivation for this differs, but with the advent of jointness, military effectiveness is increasingly cited as a goal. From a theoretical point of view, contrary to Huntington’s recommendation of civilian noninterference, in reality, these represent instances of civilian intervention in PME to maximize the military’s effectiveness.

However, these countries along with some others in Europe represent an exception rather than a rule. In most democracies, civilians have almost no role to play—either in deciding upon the curricula or as educators. As noted by Bruneau (2013, p. 196), in “Latin America, Africa, and South East Asia, the militaries themselves control the content of their forces education.” This is in keeping with

what has been characterized by Foot (2002) as the “in-house” approach to military education. This approach assumes that “its most talented officers” should be taught by “fast track, uniformed individuals” and that “participation in the course is essential for promotion” with “little or no role for a permanent academic staff.” In addition, “outsiders, whether government officials or visiting academics . . . [can] participate . . . but the weight of activity is service oriented and inward-looking,” and that students should conform to the “staff solution—a set of ‘answers’ drafted by and for the military directing staff.” As the following discussion shows, India closely adheres to this “in-house” approach.

Huntington’s Prescription: Civil–Military Relations in India

India is among the few post-colonial states with a tradition of firm civilian control. This is testament to the wisdom of its political leaders, both past and present, and its military—which has embraced the notion of being “apolitical.” However, its model of civil–military relations operates on a simple contract—civilians have eschewed interfering in what is considered the military’s domain in exchange for unquestioned political control. As Srinath Raghavan (2009, p. 167) observes, this arrangement came into place after the 1962 war as both politicians and civil servants “came to believe that the military must be given a free hand . . . [and] a convention was established whereby the civilian leadership restricted itself to giving overall directives, leaving operational matters to the military.” This arrangement can be imagined as one of different domains—with civilians exercising firm control over some matters, like nuclear weapons, and the military enjoying autonomy in others, like training, doctrine, operations, planning, etc. (Mukherjee, A. 2013). Moreover civilians—both politicians and bureaucrats—are hampered by a lack of expertise (Mukherjee, A. 2009). Hence, according to the charter of duties, the Joint Secretary (Training) in the Ministry of Defence is the nodal officer dealing with all matters pertaining to education and training. However, this post is held by an official from the Indian Administrative Services (IAS), which is a generalist cadre and has little subject matter expertise (S. P. Cohen, 2002). On paper, therefore, while this official wields considerable financial powers, they do not use their powers to reshape military education. Instead, PME is considered to be within the military’s domain.

From a theoretical perspective, as argued by S. P. Cohen and Dasgupta (2010, p. 163), “India maintains a Huntingtonian form of “objective” civilian control—each side has its own responsibilities and expertise, and the line between them is rarely if ever crossed.” Indeed, military officers have frequently referred to Huntington’s theory to justify their autonomy and resist civilian intervention (Prakash, 2014, pp. 5–6; Shukla, 2012). The lack of civilian participation and the military’s autonomy becomes clearer in the next section, which examines the historical evolution of PME in India.

Evolution of PME in India

PME for officers in independent India began with the establishment of the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) in 1947 and the National Defence Academy (NDA) in 1949 (Raina & Bakshi, 2008). Both of them educated officers from all three services and were among the first joint services institutions of its kind. The emphasis in the early years was on capacity building. Accordingly, in 1959, the National Defence College (NDC) was established which runs a 47-week course for officers of the rank of a Brigadier and was meant to replicate the British Imperial Defence College (renamed as the Royal College of Defence Studies). It was initially functioning under the Chiefs of Staff Committee, but in 1976, it was brought under the control of the Defence Ministry (Shastri, 1995). Even so in practice, Defence Ministry bureaucrats play a negligible role in the functioning of this institution and leave it to the Commandant who has always been a service officer. According to one former Commandant, “there is minimal interference or instructions from the Ministry” (personal interview, New Delhi, May 04, 2011).

Over time, arms and branch-specific courses were established in all three services. In 1959, the School of Land and Air Warfare was created in New Delhi and was later shifted to Hyderabad and renamed as the College of Air Warfare Studies. In 1970, to teach modern management techniques, an Institute of Defense Management was established at Secunderabad (Ministry of Defence, 1971, p. 14). This is currently called the College of Defence Management (CDM). Indicative of the idea that the military “owns” its education, this college did not recruit faculty from the numerous (and well established) management schools in India and instead chose to, as it still does, retain military officers for this purpose. Some of the courses started by the Services showed that they were responsive to combat experiences and attempted to fix organizational shortcomings. For instance, the “Higher Command Course” was introduced in 1971 ostensibly as a result of the experience of the 1965 war (Ministry of Defence, 1971, p. 13). In 1972, feeling the need for civilian faculty, the Commandant of Staff College “sought the induction of three civilian professors, one each for International Affairs, Applied Economics and Defence Management” (Pillai, 2015, p. 51). However, the Chiefs of Staff Committee—for reasons not entirely clear—did not accept this proposal.

In all these matters, civilians had little influence on the military education process—in what was taught, who was teaching, and how it was taught. The role of the Defence Ministry was confined to granting financial approval for establishing new schools. The Ministry was largely supportive of establishing new training and education establishments, as it reduced the requirement to send officers for courses of instruction abroad, thereby saving precious foreign exchange (Ministry of Defence, 1967, p. 14). However, the Defence Ministry lacked the authority, knowledge, and mandate to shape military education. Instead, they examined proposals purely on its financial implications and not on its technical, intellectual, or logical merit. This was understandable as civilians

lacked expertise and moreover deferred to the military as officer education was considered within its domain.

In December 1986, reflecting a general trend for widespread restructuring and reexamination of the services, a Committee for the Review of Training of Officers for the Services (CORTOS) was set up to examine officer training “starting from the N.D.A right up to the N.D.C” (Hiranandani, 2000, p. 282). Consisting of officers from all three services, it had two primary aims—to increase the technical content of services training and to increase interservices interaction or usher in jointness. Among its major recommendations was the establishment of a Naval War College, changes in the curricula at DSSC, and a recommendation that the last legs of the respective higher command courses of the three services should be conducted together (Hiranandani, 2000, pp. 282–283). Some of these measures were adopted, for instance, a Naval War College was established at Karanja (it later shifted to its current location in Goa), and the war colleges conduct a 6-week Joint Capsule. However, in overall terms, the implementation of the recommendations made by the committee, according to one of its members, was “tardy, ineffectual, and overcome by changing events” (personal interview, Vice Admiral Barin Ghosh, Gurgaon, June 25, 2011).

CORTOS was a civilian-directed attempt to reexamine officer training and education and was inspired by Minister of State for Defense Arun Singh, a technocratic politician who attempted a number of other reform initiatives. However, CORTOS suffered from a lack of civilian participation and advice—either from professional educators or from policy makers (it did not examine the Ministry of Defence or even seek their views on this subject). As it was composed entirely of military officers, it made recommendations convenient to the services, like creating an additional war college. In that sense, it was a missed opportunity. While Arun Singh’s attempt to reform officer training and education was ahead of its time, he did not envisage a role for civilians—whether as faculty or as educators. To be fair, he was unable to see many of his reform initiatives through on account of a falling out with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi—as a result of which he resigned in August 1987.

The next major development in the field of officer education occurred after the 1999 Kargil war. As a result of large-scale defense reforms, a committee was created under K. Subrahmanyam for creating the INDU. The report of this committee observed major shortcomings as described in Table 2.³

The Committee on the National Defence University (CONDU) was the first attempt at reviewing military education by a committee comprising both civilians and military officials. INDU has been projected as the intellectual hub that would consolidate education in all three services while integrating civilian officials from other ministries to promote a whole of government approach to national security. Setting up the university is a work a progress and is expected to be functional by 2018–2019. Significantly, the INDU cell, which is in charge of writing the mandate and terms of reference of this university, functions under the military. It is not assured then that it would recommend a larger role for civilians either in shaping

Table 2. Shortcomings as per the Committee on National Defence University.

Name of Course	Problems
Higher command courses in respective service war colleges	JOCAP (Joint Capsule) “does not take adequate note of the evolving battlefield milieu, joint training and joint operational planning especially as the course is pitched at higher tactical (Division) and operational levels”
College of Defence Management (CDM), Secunderabad	“The thrust of the course varies according to service . . . there are no linkages with strategic decision making”
National Defence College (NDC), New Delhi)	The “curriculum is neither as rigorous as that of a university nor is the NDC involved in any research work. The course does not provide the much desired strategic level war-gaming of national strategic issues and conflict or crisis management”
Senior Officers Education	Present service capsules for senior officer training are too “narrowly focused” and do not promote joint service training, doctrinal and operational study

the curricula or to serve as faculty in existing PME institutions. This therefore can only be known once this project finally takes shape.

Another development has been of institutional affiliations between civilian universities and institutes conducting PME. This relationship is captured in Table 3. As can be seen, there are some glaring incongruities. For instance, Osmania and Mumbai University do not even have a department of defense studies, but they still award degrees in that subject.

Civilian universities that grant degrees for PME have a role to play in curricula development, but they do not significantly shape it.⁴ Instead, their role is limited to five activities: ensuring contact hours adhere to university guidelines, a 3-day capsule explaining research methods, conducting viva, evaluating dissertations written by student officers, and offering advice on dissertation topics. Admittedly, this generalization glosses over the variation among different PME institutes. For instance, the CDM teaches concepts closer to management studies and therefore, similar to technical schools, has greater inputs from civilian faculty. However, apart from specialized subjects, the curricula are shaped largely by the military. According to Professor Utham Kumar Jamadhagni, the Head of the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies at Madras University—which grants degrees to students from the DSSC, the formal interaction between them and the military is “limited to civilians handling a few capsules like Research Methodology & International Relations besides lectures by eminent persons, as the DSSC have their own emphasis and *own their curricula*” (e-mail to author, November 21, 2016, emphasis added). Crucially, the faculty still consists of serving military officers.

In sum, the history of the officer education process in India has been largely driven by the military, and the civilians have had a negligible role. Civilian

Table 3. Civilian Universities and Military Education in India.

Institution	Degree Offered in and by	Remarks
Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), Wellington	MSc in Defence and Strategic Studies from Madras University	The oldest relationship dating back to 1978
Army War College (AWC), Mhow	MPhil in Defence and Strategic Studies from Panjab University.	Relationship since 2006
Naval War College (NWC), Goa	MPhil in Defence and Strategic Studies from Mumbai University	Relationship since 2003 however university does not have a department of defense studies
College of Air Warfare (CAW), Secunderabad	MPhil degree in Defence and Strategic Studies from Osmania University	Relationship since 2006 however university does not have department of defense studies
College of Defence Management (CDM) Secunderabad	Master of Management Studies from Osmania University	Relationship since 1994
National Defence College (NDC), New Delhi	MPhil in Defence and Strategic Studies from Madras University	Degrees are awarded since 2006

involvement has mainly been in granting financial approval for establishing new facilities or for sending officers to attend courses abroad. On this aspect, according to Air Marshal Matheswaran, former Deputy Chief of Integrated Defence Staff, “the Universities do not interfere in the curriculum. That is left entirely to the [PME] institutions . . . [The role of the Ministry of Defence is limited] to administrative aspects, policies, budgets and specifically approvals for foreign visits, students from foreign countries, etc. They have no role, nor do they have any expertise to contribute to the content of courses” (personal communication, October 28, 2016). As explained in the following section, this arrangement has resulted in significant weakness in PME.

Weaknesses in India’s System of PME

Before analyzing weaknesses in India’s system of PME, it is important to understand what it considered its main strength—the focus on preparing students for military operations. As the Indian military is operationally active—along the borders with Pakistan and China and against numerous insurgencies, the senior leadership of the military emphasizes operational readiness. According to Lieutenant General Narasimhan, former Commandant of the Army War College, the biggest strength of India’s PME is that it is “operationally/job oriented to prepare the person for the next assignment” (personal interview, September 08, 2016). Perhaps inadvertently, this also reveals a weakness—a tendency to confuse training with education.

Based on our previously defined metrics (see Table 1), India's approach to PME is not effective. This is mainly due to two reasons. First, the Indian military does not allow civilian faculty to teach at its war colleges.⁵ The faculty instead consists of serving military officers—usually outstanding students from the previous courses. As career officers, most of them find it difficult to challenge organizational myths. Critiquing the narrow focus of the Higher-Command Level Courses Lieutenant General Prakash Menon, former Commandant of NDC argued strongly in favor of inducting civilian faculty (Menon, 2015, p. 61). This idea resonates even among serving officers but has not been accepted by the military (Pillai, 2015). Perhaps as a way to compensate, the various schools have constituted a system of guest lectures delivered by eminent personalities, serving officials, or selected academics. However, even these are typically skewed more toward military speakers, both serving and retired, than civilians. For instance, an analysis of the course syllabus (which is given a security classification of Restricted) for the Army's Higher Command Course Serial HC-38 conducted between July 2009 and April 2010 indicate that civilians lectured only for 279 contact hours out of a total of 1,552 hours—just around 18%. This excludes the 990 contact hours which are devoted to visits to field formations and foreign area tour. The syllabus not only indicates a lower priority for civilian lecturers but also a higher focus on operational training as evident from its emphasis on field visits.⁶

Second, the curricula development for PME is almost entirely left to the discretion of the military. As a result, the focus is more toward operations and training than education—an aspect noted by almost all studies of PME in India. According to Menon (2015, p. 49) military education in India is “weighted towards the tactical level in all stages of professional development.” As a result, senior officers are rarely exposed or educated on the higher direction of war and on strategy. According to Major General Dipankar Banerjee (2001, p. 29), “national security is first taught at the National Defense College, for brigadiers, after 28 years of service, barely a few years before retirement.” Another analyst, a former Colonel, criticized the “tactical orientation of instruction during formal teaching that focuses on rote learning rather than holistic understanding of issues” (Chadha, 2016, p. 76; also see Pant, 2014, p. 29). These criticisms are not service specific, as Misra (2008), an Indian Air Force Officer, assailed the service for confusing training and education in its system of PME.

An unfortunate by-product of leaving curricula development to the military has been the neglect of military history. Considered the bedrock of strategic studies, military history is not emphasized in PME in India. It is a subject for the Staff College entrance exam—a competitive process to select students who attend the course, but beyond that it is not subsequently taught as a discipline to military officers (Gautam, 2011). As a result, war colleges do not cultivate or engage with military historians. In fact, there is a broader disconnect between the military and the academia, a fact admitted by two official reports—the Group of Ministers Report and the CONDU Report (Government of India, 2001; Ministry of Defence, 2002, pp. 24–27).

As military officers—either those posted as Commandants or faculty members at the different war colleges—are not professional educators they usually focus on what they know best—operations and training. Hence, nonmilitary subjects like international relations, strategic studies, political science, area studies, organizational theory, and human resources are either taught by military officers or not emphasized at all. Lamenting this state of affairs, a former instructor at Army War College argued that “there is a total absence of high caliber, qualified academic faculty to cover strategic issues relating to broader subjects concerning international and national security” (Lieutenant General Amitava Mukherjee, personal communication, June 03, 2011).

India’s Civil–Military Relations and PME

India’s pattern of civil–military relations is suited to the idea of domains—wherein civilians enjoy primacy in some fields and the military in others. According to this arrangement, education falls in the military’s domain. Civilian bureaucrats are also hampered by a lack of disciplinary expertise. Therefore, civilians have no mandate *and* knowledge to influence military education. It is unlikely therefore to imagine a civil–military partnership of the kind that has been argued for in this article. This model of civil–military relations most closely resembles Huntington’s objective control—with clear demarcation between the two domains. Weakness in military education will have deleterious consequences on the effectiveness of the Indian military; however, examining that is beyond the scope of this article.⁷ The lack of civilian intervention in what is perceived to be in the military domain in India is also supported by other examples. For instance, jointness between the services is problematic because of a lack of civilian pressure (Mukherjee, A. 2017).

Is it possible for the Indian military to address weaknesses in PME without civilian interference? Arguably, reformist officers in the military can reshape military education by creating positions for civilian faculty, engaging with professional educators while developing the curricula, and emphasizing education instead of training. However, so far, there has been no evidence of any such effort. This should not be surprising and is borne out by the experience of other countries. For instance, one study of the U.S. Army War College argued that it was impervious to change from within and that “major changes seem to require a powerful, external influence such as the end of a war, an act of Congress, or a congressional report” (Stiehm, 2002, p. 180).

The Dangers of Ill-Informed and Motivated Civilian Intervention

In making the case for greater civilian involvement in military education, it is also important to sound a cautionary warning about the danger of ill-informed or parochially motivated civilian intervention. Civilian intervention in military education

should be made for the “right” reasons—ideally on the grounds of enhancing military effectiveness or, if so required, saving fiscal resources or for educating military officers with larger political–military strategies or for a combination of the above. If however civilian intervention is prompted by factors other than these, then it has the potential to hamper military professionalism. For instance, civilians may wish to embed a particular political or religious ideology—as is common in authoritarian states. In China, for instance, there is a long history of “intervention” by the Chinese Communist Party in military education in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)—most disastrously during the Cultural Revolution (Bickford, 2008, p. 21). Similarly, the Iranian military performed poorly in the Iran–Iraq war in part because the clerical regime emphasized “ideological indoctrination rather than . . . opportunities to develop and hone military skills” (Talmadge, 2015, p. 172).

This can be a problem even in democratic countries. In Sweden, for instance, in 1999, civilians intervened and adversely shaped officer education policies in a manner, so that the “armed forces became more of a civilian bureaucratic career organization than a military force” (Hedlund, 2013, p. 143). Similarly, in Slovenia, civilian control over the education process has had “possible negative impact on military effectiveness and professionalism” (Furlan, 2012, p. 444). Due to its ability to shape the officer perceptions, military education is a powerful tool that needs to be handled with care.

The danger of motivated civilian intervention is also of concern in India. A worrisome development would be whether, under the garb of reforming military education, a particular political ideology is embedded within the military. Indeed, the Indian military has been careful in ensuring that it remains apolitical, and opening the door for civilian intervention may make this process more difficult. In addition, higher education in India faces considerable challenges—from politicization to excessive bureaucratization and loss of academic autonomy (Varghese & Malik, 2016). It therefore requires careful attention and institutional design to ensure that the ills plaguing higher education are not transmitted into the military.

Conclusion

At a broader level, there are two main implications of this article. First, from a theoretical perspective, the analysis presented here supports the arguments made by other scholars challenging Huntington’s model of “objective control” (Burk, 2002, pp. 12–15; E. Cohen, 2002, pp. 225–248). However, military officers, across countries, largely prefer the “objective control model,” as it affords them significant autonomy (Gibson, 2009, p. 242). As India’s case indicates, objective control may not be the optimum solution as civilian noninvolvement creates problems in military education. This debate is of contemporary relevance as scholars continue to engage with Huntington’s ideas and on the issue of civilian control and military effectiveness (Furlan, 2012; Hedlund, 2013). Lately, there have been calls to move beyond Huntington’s idealized and underspecified theory of objective control; however,

perhaps because of its elegant simplicity, the model continues to endure (Rapp, 2015; Travis, 2016).

Second, in terms of practice of civil–military relations, this article argues that PME should not be left only to the military. Ideally, there should be a joint approach to facilitate a dialogue between civilians—academics and policy makers—and the military. This form of a partnership has the potential to not just enhance military professionalism but also lead to healthier civil–military relations. The point here is not to civilianize military education but to propose the idea of a collaborative civil–military approach.

The arguments presented in this article suggest some avenues for future research. First, there is a need to undertake a closer study of instances of civilian intervention in military education. In how many countries and under what circumstances do civilians shape military education? What are the underlying motivations for these interventions? While in the United States and UK, civilians intervened on the grounds of effectiveness and fiscal efficiency—are there other factors in play? In democratizing Spain, for instance, civilian intervention in military education occurred to strengthen democratic norms (Serra, 2010). One would expect military education to be closely monitored in authoritarian states; however, as in the case of China, there are instances of civilian intervention in education aimed at enhancing effectiveness (Cole, 2001, pp. 119–120).

Second, what are the precise contours of the relationship between civilian universities and PME institutes in different countries? What is the role of civilians in curricula development and in PME in general? How to groom such civilian academic talent? These questions are of contemporary relevance as different countries create defense universities and thereby increase the interaction between academics and the military.

A final avenue for further research could be to examine the relationship between PME and military effectiveness. The claim, largely accepted by the academic community that the military’s effectiveness is shaped by its education, requires further empirical research. Admittedly finding a relationship between these two concepts is difficult in practice; however, the need for joint military education offers a promising line of inquiry (Keaney, 2002).

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Notes

1. To be sure, Huntington did not specifically use the term military effectiveness (perhaps because the concept of military effectiveness was not at use at that time) and instead his precise words were that objective control “maximizes the likelihood of achieving military security.” However, in the prevailing academic discourse—and one which is accepted by this article, objective control, among other measures, maximizes military effectiveness. I thank a reviewer to pointing this out.
2. For more on Huntington’s views on professional military education and how it should adhere to the objective control model, see Alagappa (2001, p. 10) and Guttieri (2006, p. 244).
3. These are reproduced from the Ministry of Defence (2002). I thank a member of this committee, who wishes to remain unnamed, for sharing a copy of the report.
4. This section is based on numerous interviews with civilian faculty who are associated with Professional Military Education (PME), student officers, and directing staff at PME Institutes in India. To speak frankly, they all requested anonymity.
5. There are some civilian instructors at technical schools, but they are focused only on imparting technical knowledge. Also, there are civilian instructors for precommissioning training; however, they are not employed in any other institute for PME. For the benefits of civilian involvement in military education, see Guttieri (2006, pp. 255–256).
6. Ideally, one would be able to access the course syllabus for all the PME institutes and then come up with a systematic analysis; however, this is impossible as the Indian military does not readily share their course syllabi.
7. For more on Indian military effectiveness, see Dasgupta (2006).

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