CHAPTER TWO

THE BORDER SECURITY FORCE (BSF)

This chapter is an attempt to understand the BSF in the context of the threat from Pakistan and Bangladesh. The first part of the chapter examines the circumstances which led to the creation of the BSF. The second part attempts to understand the role of the BSF. The third part of the chapter traces the evolution of the organisational structure of the Force. The fourth part analyses the changes that have taken place in the BSF, and the impact of such changes on the overall character of the Force. The fifth part evaluates the performance of the BSF in its various roles, and finally, some broad conclusions have been drawn to underline the importance of the BSF in overall border security planning.

Border security has always been a key issue in national security planning. The core value of any nation state is to defend and protect territory virtually at any cost. The issue becomes more complex when a country has outstanding border disputes with neighbouring countries or faces a variety of internal security problems due to porous borders. In that case, effective border management not only influences a state's external behaviour but is also seen as a solution to many internal problems.
The importance of border security in India is greater because it has suffered a lot in the past due to porous borders. India's international land border is approximately 15,225 kilometres and coastline and riverine stretches of 7517 kilometres with the neighbouring states of Bhutan and Nepal in the north, Sri Lanka in the South, Myanmar and Bangladesh in the east, and Pakistan and Afghanistan in the west. China and India share 3917 kms. of common border extending from the north west of Kashmir to the tripartite junction of India, Myanmar and China near the Tulu pass in the east.¹

There are many factors to be taken into account while talking about border security. They are: threat perceptions from neighbouring countries, populations living in border areas, the physical features of borders and the level of infrastructural development in border areas. After independence, India inherited border disputes with China, and the partition brought with it the complex problem of Kashmir which made the borders with Pakistan tension-ridden. India's border dispute with China resulted in a war in 1962. As a result of the war, India had to surrender some territory to China. Though tensions have subsided and the two countries are moving closer through various confidence building

measures, the outstanding dispute remains. China still figures as a long term strategic threat to India. With Pakistan, India has a territorial dispute over Kashmir. After the 1948 war over Kashmir, a portion of this mountain state went to Pakistan, with a 704 km long Line of control (LOC) dividing Kashmir. The Kashmir problem has not been resolved to the satisfaction of both countries. Since the 1960s, the problem with Pakistan has intensified because of growing transborder terrorism and insurgency on the Indian side with support from Pakistan. This new strategy of Pakistan, to wage a proxy war with India through support to insurgent and terrorist groups, has made the entire border with Pakistan militarised.

Bangladesh was created in 1971. The greatest threat India faces in this sector is illegal migration which created a serious problem in the north-eastern states, particularly in Assam and Tripura. Also, India is concerned about the use of territories in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Bhutan by insurgents operating in the north-east for hideouts and smuggling activities. India is situated between the 'Golden Triangle' (Myanmar, Laos and Thailand) and the 'Golden Crescent' (Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran), the two biggest narcotic producing and transit zones in the world. There has

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emerged a strong nexus between narcotic smuggling, terrorism and the proliferation of small arms in the region.\textsuperscript{3} There are more than seven million sophisticated small arms with the non-state actors in the region\textsuperscript{4}. This development has changed the nature of threat India faces from across the borders. Terrorist organisations, at present, are very motivated, well organised and heavily armed groups with sound organisational backing and sanctuaries across the border. Therefore, violent armed conflicts have become a common feature along the border. India has an open and relatively safe border with Nepal. However, the growing activities of Inter Service Intelligence of the Pakistani armed forces, and increases in smuggling, particularly of fake currency and infiltration through this border has raised alarms in the security establishment in India.\textsuperscript{6} These developments demand a fresh look at border security arrangements.


The population profile of the border areas, their attitude towards insurgents or terrorist groups, their level of integration with mainstream politics, their relationship with security forces operating in these areas, all these are very important to border security planning. The cultural proximity of border populations with people on the other side of the border make them vulnerable to adverse propaganda. The low level of economic development only compounds the problem. Thus, a sensitive and comprehensive approach towards the population living in border areas must form a key part of border security planning. Infrastructural development, especially in the transport and communication field, not only ensures greater mobility of troops but also facilitates greater integration of the local population to national mainstream.

The borders of India are not uniform either in terms of physical features or in terms of threat perception. The physical features are marked with snow-covered high peaks, deep forests in the mountains, sprawling deserts, and marshy lands and plains. As far as threat perception is concerned, India has open borders, demarcated borders, undemarcated borders, disputed border and Lines of Control (LOC). As a result, India has various security regimes along the border.

The ultimate responsibility of border defence, once war breaks out, lies with the army. However, the army does not guard the
border during peacetime. There are several reasons for this. First, border security during peace time implies prevention of trans-border crimes. This does not require sophisticated weapons and army-like training but requires a great deal of dispersion in deployment. Secondly, the army deployment on the international border doing peace time runs the risk of escalating a minor border skirmish into a bigger conflict. Thus, border security normally means a peacetime arrangement to guard the borders.

India has three paramilitary forces guarding its international borders. While the Border Security Force (BSF) guards the border with Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Assam Rifle (AR) guard the borders with China and Myanmar respectively. The army is deployed along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir and along the borders with China, and the local police of the respective State governments are deployed along the border with Nepal.

I. Origin

The BSF was created in 1965 as a paramilitary force under the Ministry of Home Affairs to replace the Armed Police Forces of various States guarding the international border with Pakistan. After 1947, the security of well-demarcated international borders was not a matter of much debate in India's security establishment.
predominant view among security planners was that there was a military threat in only those sectors of border where there was a dispute.\textsuperscript{6} Border security was not a vital component in overall national security planning. Under the prevailing thinking on national security, the disputed borders with China and the borders with Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir received special attention and were put under the army. Along the rest of the borders with Pakistan, India continued with the system of border policing it inherited in 1947. Under this system, the Armed Police forces of bordering states guarded borders to prevent petty crimes like smuggling, illegal infiltration and so on. The system of border security across the borders in Pakistan was along the same lines. Thus, while central Gujrat remained unattended, there were some Gujrat Police checkposts in the Rann of Kutch, the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary Force and the Punjab Armed Police were deployed along the borders with Pakistan in Rajasthan and Punjab, respectively.

This system continued till the early 1960s, because there were no significant changes either in India's security perspective or in the pattern of crimes along the borders. The war with China in 1962, however, brought about important changes in India's overall defence policy. The Indian defeat in 1962 war convinced the government of

\textsuperscript{6} Jasjit Singh, n.4.
the need for a fresh assessment of threat perception vis-à-vis the neighbouring countries and to develop suitable policy frameworks accordingly. The border with China received immediate attention and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) was raised to guard the border with Tibet. The border with Pakistan was also causing trouble on account of the insurgency in the north-eastern States of India and the tacit support the secessionist movements were getting from across the border. The increasing quantum of migrants from the then East Pakistan compounded the problem.

It was at this time that the structure and operational efficiency of the various armed police forces came in for close scrutiny. It was found that the organisation, standard training and state of equipment varied from one unit to another depending upon the exercise of departmental control over the battalions. Further, they were found inadequate for the increasing quantum of crimes. It was felt that, in the event of an operational emergency, the army would have to deal with these heterogeneous units of different States which would not facilitate the incorporation of such units into the overall plan of the army. The State governments, too, started complaining, as they had to devote additional money and manpower to police the borders. Though the financial burden was shared, to some extent, by the

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Central government, the State governments often complaint that border policing was an additional commitment and that the Central government should bear the entire cost incurred on this count. The Second Finance Commission noted that “States having borders with foreign countries have a special problem of border policing. Some of them (notably Punjab) asked for special assistance on this count...... In future, if strength and cost of border policing have to be increased in any State, ad hoc assistance should be given to it.”* Since the Third Finance Commission had not made specific recommendations as was done by the second Commission, it was not until the Central government had taken a decision to implement the award of the Fourth Finance Commission that the entire expenditure on border police came to be borne by the Government of India.* Apart from the financial assistance, the State governments also demanded the upgradation in equipment. As a result, the amount and the extent of the Central government’s involvement in border policing started taking concrete form. There was a feeling that Central control over border policing needed to be formalised and given concrete shape.

The confrontation with Pakistan in the Rann of Kutch in early 1965 and armed infiltration in Jammu and Kashmir exposed the

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9 Ibid.
loopholes in the existing system. During the Rann of Kutch crisis, the absence of reserves and lack of proper equipment posed difficulties in providing adequate manpower and fire support when local pressure developed at isolated places along the international border. Such problems were also felt in West Bengal, various parts of Assam and Tripura, where the government had to always be on the alert with regard to border security problems. It was in the wake of these developments that the then Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, wanted a thorough review of security arrangements on the borders with Pakistan, if necessary, a Centrally controlled the force to be established. Political leaders, both at the Centre and the border States also voiced their concerns and asked for steps to strengthen the border security arrangements.

Spelling out the reasons for the need for a centrally controlled force for border security, the first Director General of the BSF, K.F. Rustamji, noted

"After the Kutch incident of March 1965, it was clear that Pakistan would attempt an attack on India, either in Kashmir, or some other place on the border where conditions were favourable to utilise the arms that had been obtained from abroad. In order to meet such an eventuality, it was felt that the control of border police in States on the Pakistani borders

should be coordinated by the Centre and all its units trained, disciplined and equipped on a uniform standard.\textsuperscript{11}

The creation of the BSF followed exhaustive and elaborate deliberations at various levels in the government. The deliberations centered around three issues: the nature of the proposed force, its role, and its relationship with the army. Three individuals played significant role in the entire process. They were Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), General J.N. Chaudhary, and K.F. Rustamji, an IPS officer, who later became the first Director General of the BSF.

Lal Bahadur Shastri was personally convinced that the entire question of border security needed to be examined thoroughly. He chaired the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet, which decided that the whole issue of training, leadership and equipment of the police in the border areas together with its coordination with the army should be re-examined. A Study Group was set up, comprising of a high ranking army official nominated by the COAS, a Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Inspector General of Police on Special Duty in the MHA, to review the State Armed Police battalions deployed along the borders and recommend their

reorganisation and streamlining to avoid multiplicity. A Special Committee was also constituted under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary to evaluate the leadership, training, arming/equipping policy of the police battalions deployed on the borders. The committee was also empowered to arrange the necessary coordination arrangements between the armed forces and the border battalions.

General J.N. Chaudhary provided a military perspective to the question of border security. He also wrote two articles on the ongoing debate in a leading national daily. The first article put forth the idea that a police force rather than the military should guard the border during peace time. General Chaudhary in this article, wrote “the army should hold difficult sanctions of border like the cease-fire line in Jammu and Kashmir. Here certain police force

12 S.K. Ghosh and K.F. Rustamji, n.10, pp.62-64.
13 Ibid.
14 General J.N. Chaudhary wrote two articles under the cover name ‘From our Military Correspondant’ in the Statesman. The first article “An Integrated Police Force for Border Defence, Central Control: A Solution to Present Discrepencies”, on 22 April 1965. The second article came on 8 July 1965, titled “Policing and Military Duties of Border Force: Close Links with Army for Effective Operation”. Both these articles were later included in his book Arms, Aims and Aspects (Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966), pp.263-73.
are placed under their direct command to assist them in the task.\textsuperscript{16}

He mentioned

"Border protection duties under normal circumstances deal with such matters as smuggling, decoity, minor intrusions by civilians both intentional and unintentional, the exacting of dues, the guarding of officials, the protection of installations such as railways and bridges and the establishment of counter-espionage measures. All these duties do not require very sophisticated arms but do require a great deal of dispersion. Therefore, the armed police to whose lot these duties normally fall, work in small groups spread over a wide areas. These duties do not require a very high standard of military training and leadership."\textsuperscript{16}

Chaudhary thus favoured keeping the army away from the day-to-day task of border guarding as it would cause unnecessary diversion in its functioning. Besides, the undertaking of such onerous duties by the army would emasculate its strength and capabilities to perform its main task. Chaudhary was of the opinion that different segment of borders needed different kind of security arrangements. He said "Incidentally, big mistake in strategic thinking is to imagine that every inch of the border has to be guarded equally well. There are only small sections of border, violation of which means a sword thrust at the real security of the country. Violations elsewhere such as the Kutch Pakistan border, while irritating politically, are strategically only pinpricks of no major

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p.265.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
He was, therefore, in the favour of a cost-effective border police force without any sophisticated weaponry like the army because, in his opinion, the presence an over-equipped border police might escalate a minor conflict into a bigger one. Also, it would put an additional financial burden on the exchequer. On the role of the proposed border police, General Chaudhary suggested the

"the role of any such police force should be two fold. First, to undertake normal police duties along a border including anti-smuggling patrols, the checking of illegal infiltration, antidacoity measures and investigation of border crimes. Secondly, the force must be able to deal with minor armed intrusions until such times as it is relieved by the Army. After it has been relieved, it should be able, either under command or in conjunction with the Army, to continue patrolling quiet sectors and to guard certain vulnerable areas and vulnerable points against sabotage and similar troubles."¹⁸

Thus, Chaudhary provided the framework for the creation of the BSF, armed, organised, led, trained, paid, equipped on an integrated pattern. According to him, the nucleus of the Force could be had from the State police battalions then deployed on the borders, as these could be spared by the States. Besides, the manpower and the officers could be drawn from the army to give it initial stability. He even offered the idea that, at the early stages training could be undertaken by the army.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid.
¹⁸ Ibid., pp.269-70.
¹⁹ Ibid.
The Study Group also recommended the creation of a police force controlled by the Central government for border security. The ultimate responsibility of guarding the borders, the Study Group felt, should lie with the army and all suitable measures should be taken to ensure proper coordination with the army at every level.\textsuperscript{20}

The essential features of what later became the BSF emerged during a discussion the then Home Secretary, L.P. Singh had with General Chaudhary on 17 May 1965. K.F. Rustamji was chosen to head the Force. His immediate task was to ensure the proper integration of Armed Police forces of various States into a compact and disciplined paramilitary organisation. Rustamji later wrote

"I was of the opinion that if a separate Force for border security and border defence is required, it would be such as would shoulder the responsibility of guarding the border effectively and fully. At the beginning, it was suggested that all the Armed Police battalions that were stationed on the borders would be absorbed in the BSF. These battalions were on the borders from different States and I was apprehensive whether the concerned State governments would agree to this proposal or not. I also attended the meeting called by the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri in the month of June 1966. The deliberations in the meeting convinced me of the ultimate outcome because I found that Lal Bahadur Shastri was fully determined to found the BSF on solid foundation."\textsuperscript{21}

Thus came into existence the BSF on 1 December 1965 as an armed force of the Union under item II, List I of schedule VII of the

\textsuperscript{20} Surindur Singh, n.7, p.40.
\textsuperscript{21} Surindur Singh, n.7, p.38.
Constitution. The constitutional position of the BSF was based on Article 355 of the Constitution which reads “It shall be the duty of the Union to protect every state against external aggression and internal disturbance.”\textsuperscript{22} Entry I of the Union List relates to the defence of India which is the exclusive responsibility of the Union.

At that time 25.5 battalions of the Rajasthan Armed Police, the Punjab Armed Police, the Assam Armed Police, the West Bengal Rifles and Tripura Border Police were deployed on the borders. The first task was to integrate them as battalions of the BSF. The headquarters of the Force was established in New Delhi. Rustamji was appointed as the Director General with two Inspector Generals as Sector Commanders and seven Deputy Inspector Generals and sub-Sector Commanders. The setting up of the BSF goes to the credit of Rustamji who put in an enormous effort and laid the foundations of a Force which later became the largest paramilitary organisation in the world. He organised the working of BSF headquarters in six Directorates, each under the charge of an officer of the rank of the Deputy Inspector General (DIG). Senior IPS and army officers were sub-Sector Commanders. Seven Sectors were established at Jallandhar, Jodhpur, Jammu, Srinagar, Bandipur, Kadamata and Shillong. Side by side, twelve Reserve battalions of the BSF were also

\textsuperscript{22} The constitution of India (New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice, 1991), p.100.
raised, and five India Reserve battalions were amalgamated into the BSF.\textsuperscript{23}

A crucial problem was the officering of these battalions. Four hundred and forty four army officers that were released from the army were inducted. Also, to the advantage of the BSF was the fact that the State Armed Police battalions that formed the core of the BSF had a rich experience of border vigilance and the 1965 war. For example, the 29\textsuperscript{th} battalion of the Punjab Armed Police, embodied as the 25\textsuperscript{th} battalion of the BSF, had fought in the Hussainiwala sector and had received seven gallantry awards. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} battalion of the Punjab Armed Police, later embodied as 30\textsuperscript{th} battalion of the BSF, was in the Kargil area under the army and had suffered losses on 10 August 1965 while guarding Shamsa bridge on the Drass-Kargil highway. Similarly, the 48\textsuperscript{th} battalion of the BSF, formerly the 1\textsuperscript{st} battalion of the Punjab Armed Police, fought in the Rajitsingh Pura area. This embodiment process came to an end in 1967, and, thereafter, depending on requirements, further units were raised.

\textsuperscript{23} An India Reserve (IR) battalion is an Armed Police force of the State where it is raised. The IR battalion is more or less based on the pattern of a State Armed Force battalion. The IR battalion are to augment the Armed Police forces of the state to maintain 'public order' more effectively, and to minimise dependence on the paramilitary forces of the union. IR battalions are kept stationed in the State of their origin, but are available to other States to help them when required.
A close examination of the circumstances that led to the birth of the BSF gives the impression that short term tactical considerations were the main influencing factors. It was thought that a Centrally-controlled police would be more useful for the army in a war situation. The army favoured the creation of a force which could look after its peripheral obligations like patrolling, policing and other complimentary tasks. It never supported the idea of a heavily armed sophisticated Force in the forward area which would have meant the existence of two parallel units on the borders and would have given sufficient room for mutual distrust and rivalry. On the other hand, the growing unwillingness of the State governments to devote additional resources and manpower to border policing resulted in the increasing involvement of the Central government in border policing which led to the creation of the BSF. The BSF was created out of immediate compulsion not as a result of long term strategic planning.

The absence of a proper framework within which the border security and border-guarding force could be related to the overall strategic goals of the country left the BSF with a very limited space to operate. For all practical purposes, it was neither a police force nor an armed force and vacillated from one role to another depending on the requirements of the Central government. As the Force grew in size, it started encroaching on the jurisdiction of both the army and
the State law and order apparatus. In fact, it never developed a comfortable relationship either with the army or with the local police. The Central government kept the profile and the role of the force rather flexible and used it for various other purposes as well.

The BSF was created under the Central Reserve Police Force Act 1948. Later in 1968, a separate Act was passed by parliament to give the Force proper shape. The then Home Minister, Y.B. Chavan, presented the B.S.F. Bill in the Lok Sabha on 23 July 1968 as “a Bill to provide for the institution and regulation of an armed force of the Union for ensuring the security of the borders of India and for matters connected therewith.”24 The statement of the objects of the proposed Bill said “the BSF is charged with the responsibility of ensuring the security of the India-Pakistan international border, instilling a sense of security among the people living in border areas and preventing trans-border crimes, smuggling and unauthorised entry into or exit from Indian territory.”25

The debate on this Bill centred around two core areas. The first was related to the exact nature of the Force: would it be treated like a police or an armed force; and second, would this force would be used exclusively for border security or would it be used in other parts of

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25 Ibid.
the country for the maintenance of law and order also? Raising the first issue, George Fernandes said

"the proposed Act is heavily influenced by the Army Act, 1950. The structure of discipline and punishment under the Act is severe compared to what is applicable to ordinary police force. Also, in matters of forming association, the BSF personnel are at par with military personnel and when it comes to other conditions, they are treated differently. Therefore, the government should be absolutely clear on this point. If they are to be treated like the army, the provisions related to service conditions and other benefits should be similar to that of the army."\(^{26}\)

The government conceived of this Force as a paramilitary body with the status and proficiency required by the personnel of the BSF being somewhere between the armed police of various States and the army. Therefore, while the structure of discipline was kept akin to that of the army the other benefits and perks were at par with police organisations. Also, the government decided that the Force would be headed by an IPS officer, but, at the same time, insisted that the training and orientation would be comparable to an infantry battalion of the army.\(^{27}\)

The second issue was related to the use of the BSF for law and order and other internal security duties in different States. Jyotirmay Basu's apprehension was that the Force would be used as a weapon of the Congress-run Central government to interfere in the

\(^{26}\) Ibid., p.877.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p.900.
internal affairs of the States because the Centre did not trust the police force under the control of the State government, especially where the Congress was out of power.²⁸ He recalled an incident where the BSF battalions were sent to Calcutta, given independent charge and refused to carry out the orders of State police officials. Echoing these apprehensions, Indrajit Gupta pointed out that the proposed Bill and the Annual Report of the Ministry of Home Affairs for 1967-68 held contradictory positions as far as the use of the BSF for the maintenance of law and order was concerned. He said "Everywhere in this Bill, it is explicitly laid down that this Force is meant for security of international border between India and Pakistan and is not meant for maintenance of internal law and order."²⁹ However, in the Home Ministry's Report in 1967-68 it is stated that on a number of occasions "These Border Security Forces units were made available for the maintenance of law and order and they did commendable work."³⁰ In 1966, when trade union agitations and food agitations were on in West Bengal, the BSF units were deployed extensively. He warned that "If the BSF is used for these purposes, the type of morale and efficiency you need for border security can never be instilled in

²⁸ Ibid., p.842.
²⁹ Ibid., p.848.
³⁰ Ibid.
these units."\textsuperscript{31}

The Bill did not have safeguards against these kind of "abuses". As the BSF was raised under Article 355 of the constitution, it was just like any other Armed Forces at the disposal of the Central government. All the minister said in reply was to assure the House that the deployment of Central forces on law and order duties was done only in extreme conditions and with the consent of the concerned State governments.

The Act was passed in the winter session of parliament in 1968. Presidential consent was received on 2 December 1968 and thereby the Act, after enactment, came into operation.

II. Role

The BSF was created to ensure the security of international borders with Pakistan and for matters connected therewith.\textsuperscript{32} The main role of the BSF, therefore, is to be performed during peacetime. It is the duty of the army to defend the borders during war time. The BSF has a very limited role during wartime, that is, to assist the army. Thus, the BSF was conceived of as a peacetime apparatus. The recommendations of the study Group as well as the BSF Act, 1968, and the BSF Rules make this point clear. Over the years, however,

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{32} Ministry of Home Affairs, \textit{Annual Report}, 1967-68, p.32.
the Force has come to play diversified roles, such as, counterinsurgency and anti-terrorist operations, maintenance of law and order, and other internal security duties. These are not the roles for which the BSF was originally created.

The role of the BSF can better be analysed by putting it under three categories: Peacetime roles, war time roles and other roles.

Peacetime Roles

The peacetime roles of the BSF are five-fold: first, to instill a sense of security amongst populations living in the border areas, second, to prevent transborder crimes; third, to prevent unauthorised entry into and exit from India; fourth, to prevent the activities of smugglers, and lastly to collect trans-border intelligence.33

These peacetime roles evidently envisage the deployment of the Force in the form of small Border Out Posts (BOPs). These BOPs are normally in most forward areas and are entrusted with the responsibility of guarding the border within a specified area in the form of the length of the demarcated border from pillar to pillar. These BOPs discharge their duties through static deployment,

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patrolling, laying of ambushes and other preventive measures. Most of their tasks are preventive in nature.

During such deployments, certain police and custom powers have been conferred on the BSF. In Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, within an eighty kilometre belt from the international border, in Rajasthan a fifty kilometer belt and in Punjab, West Bengal and Assam a fifteen kilometer belt, the BSF is entitled to make use of the following sections of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr. P.C.): 41(10), 47(1), (2), (3), 51(1), 52, 149, 150, 151, 41(2), 109, 100 and 131. By virtue of the powers conferred by sub section (1) of the section 139 of the BSF Act, 1968, any member of the Force may, within the local limits of the area specified in the Act, exercise and discharge powers and duties under section 47, 48, 51, 53, 54, 149, 150, 151 and 152 of the Cr. P.C.

The custom powers given to the BSF relate to search of suspected persons entering and leaving India, power to screen with X-rays, power to arrest, power to stop and search conveyance, seizure of goods, documents and other things. The sections of the Custom Act, 1962 which apply to the BSF also are sections 100, 101, 102,

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34 Ibid.  
35 Ibid.
103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108 and 110. Similarly, powers under the Dangerous Drugs Act, 1938, Opium Act 1878, Passport (Entry into India) Act 1920, Passport Act 1967 and the Registration of Foreigners Act are conferred on the BSF.

Though the peacetime roles of the BSF are well defined, a closer examination reveals that the BSF performs these duties under several limitations. The operational procedures necessary to perform these roles are not well-defined and there is an overlapping of jurisdictions with other agencies. For example, the first important role of the BSF is to provide a sense of security amongst people living in border areas, but it is not clear how the BSF will do this. Mere presence of a well-equipped Force is not suffice to provide a sense of security especially when the BSF is perceived as an outside Force. The level of interaction with border populations is not very friendly and a sense of mutual distrust prevails. The State governments have a very important role to play in this regard yet there is no institutional arrangement between the BSF and the State governments to achieve this goal.

Another major task, the prevention of trans-border crime, is also not exclusive to the BSF. The civil police of the border district in also fully authorised to prevent it. This overlapping of jurisdictions

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38 Ibid.
creates problems of coordination. Prevention of crime in border areas requires a lot of intelligence inputs from local population and a fair amount of coordination between various law enforcing agencies. In the absence of formally laid down structures, administrative precedents and discretion influence the interpretation of roles and respective jurisdictions of various agencies.

As for the prevention of smuggling, custom officials are also involved. They are also charged with the responsibility to prevent smuggling on the land borders, and they exercise watch over the movement of trans-border criminals. Powers enjoyed by the BSF under the Customs Act are limited and as such the BSF personnel, on the borders, have to keep close laison with the local custom officials.

The task of collection of trans-border intelligence is not exclusive to the BSF. Collection of intelligence is also done by the Intelligence Bureau (IB), the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), Military Intelligence (MI) and intelligence units of various State governments. The collection of intelligence inputs and their interpretation require a great level of interaction among various agencies. But divided loyalties and lack of accountability often hampers this task.

Thus, even the primary role of the BSF is not exclusive and different interpretation of roles by various agencies create problems
Wartime Roles

Since the BSF is deployed in forward areas, it has to have the capability to absorb the initial brunt of surprise attack by the enemy. The wartime role of the BSF is only in emergencies. Still, the Force can play an important role in conjunction with the army. It can use its familiarity with the terrain effectively to deny initial gains by the advancing enemy troops. Also, the Force can provide important inputs to the army commanders.

Keeping these factors in view, certain wartime roles have been given to the BSF. The first of these is holding guard in less threatened sectors as long as the main attack does not develop in a particular sector and it is felt that the local situation is within the capabilities of the BSF to deal with. The BSF units can remain deployed in a particular sector even in a war situation in order to release the army for offensive attack in the event of a major attack developing which is not within the capability of the BSF to deal with. The army can be expected either to reinforce the BSF or relieve the BSF in toto into a particular sector.

Secondly, the BSF can protect vital installations, particularly airfields, against the enemy commandos/para-troopers, provide extensions to the flanks of main defended areas by holding strong
points in conjunction with border units of the army as also limited
aggressive action against paramilitary or irregular forces of the
enemy within the overall plan of the army.

A third wartime role is performing special tasks connected with
intelligence, including raids and acting as a guide in an area of
responsibility where the routes are known to the BSF.

Lastly, the BSF can perform a number of miscellaneous
functions including the maintenance of law and order in enemy
territory administered under the control of the army, providing
escort for convoys, guarding prisoners of war, and assistance in the
control and habitation of refugees.\textsuperscript{37} The wartime role of the BSF
envisages proper integration of BSF units with army formations at
the ground level, good coordination between the army commander
and the BSF Commander, and assigning appropriate tasks to the BSF
units keeping in view their training, equipment, and morale.

Other Roles

Apart from the above mentioned roles, the BSF, presently, is
performing a number of other tasks like assisting the civilian
authorities in the maintenance of law and order, counterinsurgency
and anti-terrorist operations.

\textsuperscript{37} Ministry of Home Affairs, \textit{Annual Report}, 1992-93, p.23..
Assistance to the civilian authorities in the maintenance of law and order is not the role of the BSF. A separate paramilitary force, the CRPF has been raised for that purpose. Unlike the CRPF, the BSF does not enjoy certain police powers necessary to carry out such roles. Therefore, the status of the BSF in such operations is just like the army. Like the latter, the BSF when deployed for law and order duties derives powers from section 130 and 131 of the Cr. P.C. which provides for initiatives taken by the armed forces of the Union. In a public disorder situation, when a gazetted officer of the Force finds that he is unable to communicate with an Executive Magistrate, he may, with the men under his command, disperse an unlawful assembly in the interest of public security and arrest and confine persons forming part of it. He should then communicate with the Executive Magistrate, if it becomes practicable to do so, and thereafter, obey his instructions. 38 While carrying out the tasks assigned to them by state civil authorities for restoring normalcy in an area affected by public disorder, they can act on the principle that the measures taken are the minimum necessary to prevent serious crimes and that all care and skill is exercised. Even in these duties, the BSF retains certain characteristics. First, the BSF can never be used as a lathi force. Secondly, its strength cannot be reduced below

38 See Criminal Procedure Code (New Delhi: Ministry of Law and Justice, 1974).
the Platoon level. Finally, the BSF Companies, while deployed on law and order duties, are self-contained and do not depend on local authorities for logistics. They carry their own transport, ration and tents.\textsuperscript{39}

The BSF has been used for counterinsurgency and anti-terrorist operations. The BSF participation, in these roles, is largely of military nature. It is extensive and involves prolonged deployment and tactical operations. The nature of deployment is also different. Sometimes the Force works under the operational control of the army, while in most other deployments, it assists the civilian authorities. A distinct feature of counterinsurgency and anti-terrorist operations is that often these operations are carried out with other security forces like the CRPF, the ITBP, the Assam Rifles, the Rashtriya Rifles and the local police. The BSF does not enjoy exclusive powers of curbing insurgency and terrorism in a specific area. In some cases, the territorial jurisdiction is indicated by the area Commander for purposes of efficiency. The multiplicity of force often proves counterproductive and several Commanders end up blaming each other for any failure.\textsuperscript{40} Also, the overall objective of political leadership and various political pulls and pressures lead to

\textsuperscript{39} Anjali Nirmal, n.33, pp136-42.

\textsuperscript{40} Interview with a Commandant of the BSF on 26 March 1999 in New Delhi.
different interpretations of the role, rendering the task of deployed force a bit difficult.

III. Organisation

At the time of its inception, the BSF had a moderate organisational structure commensurate with the role the Force was designed to play. The Directorate General was set up at Delhi. It functioned as the Headquarter of the Force which was headed by the Director-General (DG). It had six branches each under the command of an officer of the rank of Deputy Inspector General (DIG), two Sectors each under an officer of the rank of the Inspector General (IG) and seven Sub-sectors each headed by a DIG. The strength of the Force was 37½ battalions. Gradually, as the Force grew in size and started playing more complex and diverse roles, the organisation also expanded. At present, the BSF is the largest paramilitary organisation in the world. With its Headquarter at Delhi, the Force is spread over eight Frontiers and one ad hoc Frontier for internal security duties. It has fourteen Sectors, 157 battalions, three main training institutes, one Basic Training Centre, two Combat Training Schools, a Water Wing, an Air-wing, twenty Post Artillery Groups, one tear smoke manufacturing units and one Dog Training Centre.42

41 S.K. Ghosh and K.F. Rustamji, n.10, p.64..

The BSF functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs. All policy level decisions relating to the use, orientation, deployment and budgetary allocation are taken at the Ministry level. The overall leader of the Force is the Director General, who is normally a senior Indian Police Service Officer. He functions through the Directorate General which has several departments like Operations, Communications, Training, Administration, Provisioning, Accounts and General. Each department is headed by an officer of the rank of an IG.

The line organisation of the BSF consists of Frontiers headed by the IGs, Sectors headed by the DIGs and battalions headed by the Commandants. For all practical purposes the operative level of command is limited to a battalion. At the directive level, command is at the level of the DIGs, the IGs and the DG. Since the upper echelon of the Force is dominated by the IPS officers, their role is limited to giving overall direction to the Force. The direction to the functioning of the Force in the field is not as intimate and as direct as is the case of army field formations like the Brigade, Division or corps. In the case of senior army formations, command and control is very intimate and the senior officials are personally responsible for the

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43 Ibid.
44 Surinder Singh, n.7, p.68.
efficient functioning of their units. This is because the army is expected to function at higher formation levels whereas in the case of the BSF, the level of functioning is generally platoon or company. Even battalion level actions are rare. The directive level of command, therefore, mainly involves reviewing the functioning of the Force at the ground-level and coordinating with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. 48

The main functional unit of the BSF is a battalion. A BSF battalion is organised on the pattern of an army infantry battalion with the exception that a standard BSF battalion is self-sufficient in all respects because the deployment is often in far flung areas and in small detachments. A standard BSF battalion comprises of six Service Companies and one Support Company. A Service Company consists of one Headquarter Unit and three Platoons. A Platoon consists of one Headquarter unit and three Sections. The lowest operative unit is a Section headed by a Head Constable. At the Platoon level the command is with a subordinate officer of the rank of a Subedar. A Company functions under the command of an Assistant Commandant (AC) or the Deputy Commandant (DC). As most of the deployment for border security duties or internal security duties are done at the Company level, most of the tactical planning is done at this level. The

48 Ibid., p.72.
junior officers of the BSF play an important role in giving the Force a distinct character.

At the battalion level the Commandant functions both as a Commander as well as a Controller. The Commandant is the culmination of the operative level of command in the BSF.\(^46\) All operational direction flows from of the Commandant. The Commandant is the chief representative of the organisation.

About the command structure of the BSF, Surinder Singh, a retired IG of the BSF says, “An overall view of command and leadership elements in the BSF gives an impression that more leaders seem to be engaged in controlling than commanding. The organisational structure, the nature and complexity of jobs, duality, co-jurisdictional compulsions of both peace and wartime are responsible for this dispensation.”\(^47\)

Support Infrastructure

The deployment in forward locations along the border and the nature of the jobs performed by the BSF requires state-of-the-art communication systems. The constant liasoning with the army and civilian authorities to achieve operational efficiency and to match the sophisticated equipment used by smugglers, narco-terrorists, and

\(^{46}\) Ibid., p.74.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., p.77.
terrorist organisations necessitates a reliable and modern communication support system at the ground level. The BSF maintains a vast network of communication both on radio as well as on land line circuit. Recently, a radio relay system has been introduced to provide speed connectivity at remote locations. Also, 62 V-SATS have been proposed to various BSF locations as part of the national Police Network (POLNET) scheme under which V-SAT terminals for communication through satellite have been proposed for State capitals, district headquarters and Central Police Organisation (CPO). 48

The V-SAT terminals will be provided to Sector headquarters of some selected battalions and training institutions to enable them to communicate through satellite. Suitable training is being imparted both at New Delhi and Banglore to improve the communications skills of communication personnel. The introduction of automatic switching systems has enhanced the speed with which any Sector headquarters can pass a message to any other Sector headquarter without loss of time. 49 Through this system, messages from one location to the other can be passed without any human intervention.


49 Ibid.
The BSF is constantly trying to upgrade its communication infrastructure keeping in view the emerging threats. The revolution in information technology has made terrorist groups and smugglers more technology friendly. It is becoming difficult to match the modern equipment use by criminals. The procurement of new devices has to go through a long and cumbersome bureaucratic process. As the BSF has got very limited powers in matters of procurement, the matter gets delayed in the relevant ministry. Secondly, these modern electronic devices are very expensive, and various agencies working in border areas require them. It is necessary, therefore, to develop some kind of coordination among various agencies. This will facilitate quick interception and dissemination of information to concerned authorities. Some of the BOPs are still filled with old communication devices which make them vulnerable to interception/jamming by the sophisticated instruments available to terrorist outfits. This area needs urgent attention.

The upward swing in the volume of smuggling and the increasing surveillance on the land borders by the security forces have make smugglers redirect their activities through riverine borders. This has forced the BSF to form a water wing. Though initially equipped with outdated motor-boats and country boats, the

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60 Interview with a Senior Official of the BSF on 18 April 2000 in New Delhi
water wing has been subsequently modernized and now has a number of fast-moving motor-boats. Besides guarding the riverine borders, these have helped check the volume of smuggling.

To provide communication to far flung areas, the BSF has organised its own air wing. Initially started with the old war horse, the Dakotas, the air wing has developed further and now boasts of a number of transport aircraft including HS 748 Avros.

It was felt that it was not always possible to provide artillery fire support from the army to the BSF in far flung and isolated BOPs during confrontations or war. The BSF, therefore, created its own Artillery Regiment. Twenty Post Group Artillery was raised in a remarkably short period and deployed in support of the BSF's own troops.\(^{31}\)

The BSF has plunged into a hitherto unexplored field, namely, the manufacture of ammunition for tear gas. The increasing deployment of paramilitary forces and armed police units for law and order duties has required frequent use of tear gas in keeping with the principle of the minimum use of force to deal with rioting mobs and other contingencies. For years, tear gas ammunition was being imported from foreign countries. The BSF ventured into this new

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\(^{31}\) Post Artillery is the artillery unit of the BSF to provide support to far flung and isolated BOPs.
enterprise and its tear smoke units at Tekanpur (Madhya Pradesh) is now manufacturing tear smoke ammunition completely indigenously and supplying it to all paramilitary forces and state police units.

To chase the smugglers and trans-border infiltrators, it was felt that the use of tracker dogs would greatly help. The National Dog Training School, therefore, started under the aegis of the BSF at Tekanpur. The Dog Training School now boasts of some of the first tracker dogs in the country.

IV. Changes in the BSF

Over the years, the threat from internal sources have become more complex and widespread. This change in the internal security situation has influenced the response of the Indian state. One remarkable feature of this growing concern on internal security issues was greater involvement of the Central government in internal conflicts. Another important development was increasing reliance on the instrument of force to deal with political conflicts. The BSF as an instrument of force was also affected by this change. The force which was created for a limited purpose to guard India’s international boarders gradually became one of the more sophisticated instruments at the hands of the Central government in countering the threats from internal sources. This growing importance of the BSF led to a phenomenal expansion of the force not only in terms of strength but
also in role. While these changes have ensured a greater involvement of the BSF in internal security matters, they have raised some important questions as well. At what level have these changes affected the BSF as an organization? Has the force deviated from the role for which it was created? To what extent have these changes affected the relationship of the BSF with other institutions, particularly with the army? What kind of institutional responses has the BSF evolved while coping with these changes? Lastly, have these changes helped evolve a framework within which the BSF must work?

Expansion

From a moderate strength of 37 ½ battalions in 1968, the BSF presently is a 157 battalion strong force. This means almost a five-fold increase in the strength over a period of thirty years

Table No.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Battalions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>37 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
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<td>90</td>
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<td>146</td>
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<td>1991</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BSF, A booklet published by Directorate General, BSF. New Delhi).
Table No.5

Growth of Manpower in the BSF since 1986

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Manpower</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>135544</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>149568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>171168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>171363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>171735</td>
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<td>1994</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>181289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>181403</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table No.6

Expenditure on the BSF Since 1987-88 (in lakh)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-89</td>
<td>4069851</td>
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<td>1989-90</td>
<td>4690886</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>5909243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>6730091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>7540474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>8781800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>9137755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>10341117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>11813229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Between 1965 and 1980, 19 battalions were raised. The growth was moderate, because the BSF was largely performing the role for which it was created. Also, there were no marked changes either in
the pattern of crime or the nature of military threat on India's international borders. The deployment of the BSF for internal security duties was done only in exceptional cases. However, between 1980 and 1990, 66 new battalion were raised. The period between 1985 and 1990 is especially important, as far as the expansion of the BSF is concerned. Sixty new battalions were raised during this period. Most of the expansion during this period was influenced by the developments in Punjab. After Operation Blue Star and the assassination of Indira Gandhi, there was a surge in militancy in Punjab. The terrorist organizations operating in Punjab received moral and material support from Pakistan. The international border with Pakistan became tension-ridden. The well-organized, heavily armed terrorists would go to Pakistan for training and would infiltrate into India.\textsuperscript{62} The smuggling of arms and ammunition also increased. Effective border management, it was felt, would put a check on terrorist incidents. It was in this context that it became necessary to augment the strength of the BSF. Also since the late 1980s, there was a surge in militancy and insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir. The government adopted a similar approach there, as the pattern of trans-border smuggling of arms and infiltration of terrorists were much the same as in Punjab.

\textsuperscript{62} Interview with a senior BSF personnel on 26 March 1999 in Delhi.
This period also witnessed increasing deployment of the BSF in internal security. Earlier, this feature was an exception; from the 1980s on, it has almost become a permanent phenomenon, with the government arguing that the demand for paramilitary forces in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir necessitated ad hoc deployments of the BSF for counterinsurgency and anti terrorist duties.

This rapid growth within a short span did not take into account its impact on organisational cohesiveness and the training of the Force. Often, new battalions were raised from the existing battalions which badly affected the orientation and command structure of the force. 63 On more than one occasion, the government admitted that the BSF is not trained to handle various complex internal security problems and on such occasions pre-induction training is imparted. 64 But at a time when the demands on the force were immense and it was overstretched, such training was not always feasible.

Thus, the pattern of growth indicates that it was influenced by circumstantial exigencies rather than well structured strategic planning. It was an ad hoc response to emerging threats.

63 Ibid.
64 Estimate Committee (1996-97), Sixth Report (Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi 1997), p.3.
Role Deviation

Perhaps the most significant change in the BSF has been its frequent, almost permanent deployment for internal security duties. Internal security is not the original role of the BSF. The force is not equipped and trained to play such a role. For quite sometime, there has been a serious internal debate within the organization on this issue. However, heavy reliance on the CRPF and the consequent lack of adequate reserves, reluctance on the part of the borrowing States to spare the deployed battalions of paramilitary forces over-reliance on force and need to rush assistance at very short notice have contributed to frequent use of the BSF.66 States have developed an unfortunate proclivity to use the assistance of the Centre in dealing with situations hitherto managed by their armed police battalions. In recent times, most States found it convenient to pass on their problems to the centre.

The tendency to ignore the threat at the initial stage due to various political reasons has often resulted in aggravating the situation. The armed forces of the Union were essentially created to bridge the gap arising from the failure of the States to discharge their constitutional responsibility. Except in regard to the CRPF, which is

the only Central Force trained to provide support to the States for law and order maintenance, the ad hoc deployment of other paramilitary forces has been at the significant cost of their mandated duties. The Estimates Committee of Parliament in its sixth report also echoed the same view: “As the simultaneous deployment of these Forces on internal security duties is leading to the problem of coordination, and also adversely affecting their primary role, the Committee feels that a need has arisen to review the functioning of Central paramilitary forces and reorganize them so that not only the problems of law and order in the States can be looked into effectively but also so that their primary roles are not affected adversely.”\footnote{Estimate Committee, n.54, p.6.}

The tendency to deploy the BSF for internal security duties derives sanction from the framework of the central police organisation. All the paramilitary force were raised under Article 355 of the Constitution and are at the disposal of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Constitutionally, they can be deployed anywhere in the country to assist State governments. Though these forces were raised at different point of time to deal with specific challenges, the absence of a comprehensive policy towards internal problems has often prompted the Central government to use various forces for different purposes. The dominant perception among security planners is that
such deployments are done only in emergency and that, too, for a short durations to achieve quick results. In reality, however, this phenomenon has become a permanent feature. While such deployments can be justified in an emergency, their increasing frequency and deployment for long durations is creating problems not only for the forces involved but the State police organisations also.

One problems is that parallel and different types of Forces operate in the same area doing the same job. For example, in Jammu and Kashmir, apart from the local police, the army, BSF, CRPF and ITBP are deployed in anti-terrorist operations. Since these Forces are different in their training, orientation, equipment, and their command and control, this creates a lot of problems in operational matters. Also, it erodes the credibility of the local police and their ability to handle tough assignments.

The consequent neglect of the local police affect their moral. The paramilitary forces are perceived as outsiders. Their persistent presence often proves counter productive. As Brigadier Satbir Singh says that if the paramilitary forces fight the insurgents they become freedom fighters and if the local police confront them, they are branded as criminals.67 The argument is that the deployment of the

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Central Forces almost on a permanent basis changes the complexion of conflict. Therefore, the local police should be trained and equipped to deal with the problem and the paramilitary force should be called only in exceptional cases. In Punjab, it was the local police which fought terrorism. The role of the BSF was only complementary in the later stages.88

The role deviation has affected the BSF as an organisation. The dominant feeling within the force is that internal security is not its original role and the BSF is doing someone else's job.89 This attitude brings a sense of ad hocism and prevents a positive transfer of experience. Secondly, this has also affected their training. The Force has become over-stretched and personnel are being pushed around from State to State, are being denied leave and are consequently becoming exhausted and demoralized. Thirdly, the frequent deployment in a hostile environment often puts personnel under extreme psychological pressure which they are not trained to handle. This psychological stress causes behavioural disorders and often results in fairly high rates of human rights violations by BSF personnel. This syndrome particularly affects the junior level officials. Fourthly, the frequent movement from one place to another

88 Interview with a senior BSF official on 18 April 2000, in Delhi.
89 Surindar Singh, n.7, p.80.
in different environments imparts a sense of ad hocism in command and administrative field. This adversely affects organisational cohesiveness. Lastly, internal security duties badly affect the BSF's main role.\textsuperscript{60} Deployment for internal security duties are often done after withdrawing troops from the border which leaves the borders unguarded.

Thus, we find that role deviation has had a negative impact on the BSF and is adversely affecting the Forces main commitment to defend the country's borders.

Relationship with the Army

In its primary role, the BSF has a dual responsibility. On the one hand, it is required to patrol the borders against non-military incursions and create a sense of security among border populations, and on the other hand, it has to work under the operational command of the army in a supplementary capacity. Because of this peculiar role, the BSF found it difficult to establish a trouble free relationship with the army or the regular police force. In particular, the relationship with the army has been far from satisfactory. It is long-standing demand of the army that the BSF should be put under its control. The army gives many reasons for this. First, with the logistical administrative and training infrastructure built up over the

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
years, the BSF has developed into a parallel army. Border defence, the army feels has to be closely knit with the army and the BSF cannot be permitted to have its own way and an independent empire in forward areas causing innumerable problems of command and control.\textsuperscript{61} It can lead to diffusion of responsibility and in the event of border incursions and any other emergencies can cause confusions and delay in taking remedial actions.\textsuperscript{62} Even where the BSF functions under the army’s operational command there are problems due to divided loyalties. BOPs are likely to report directly to their superior officers completely bypassing the local military authority.

Secondly, due to their different outlook, training and background the BSF cannot easily be integrated with the army in war situation.\textsuperscript{63} Their frequent diversion to police duties make such integration much more difficult.

Thirdly, the border-guarding forces should have a greater military orientation but the officering pattern of the BSF creates problems. At the DIG level, and above the IPS officers have an exceptionally strong presence. By virtue of their training they are

\textsuperscript{61} Lt. Colonel Gautam Sharma, n.54.


\textsuperscript{63} Navneet Sharma, "Army wants Special Cell to Monitor CPOS", \textit{Statesman} (Calcutta), 6 May 1993.
poor in tactical planning in a war like situation. These personnel who have spent a good part of their careers in civil policing are being asked to coordinate the actions of units/ formations against well-trained well-armed and highly-motivated insurgents and terrorists. In the absence of tactical training, they find it difficult to handle the situation.\textsuperscript{64} If they are put under army control, it will be possible to transmit the experience gained by the army in command and control, development of concepts, doctrines and standard operational procedures.

The solution, it is being argued, is the merger of several existing border Forces into a unified border Force under army's control.\textsuperscript{65} The advantage of this system will be that there will be a single ministry responsible for planning, coordination and execution through a well knit agency towards effective border security.\textsuperscript{66}

The argument put forth by the army presents a military perspective of border security. India has very extensive and diverse borders. The pattern of crime is also in different sectors of the border. This does not require a military solution. Rather, a

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
comprehensive approach, taking into account the overall development of border areas would be a more appropriate approach to deal with border security problems. The BSF is suited to this approach. Its police character makes it more flexible in operating in different circumstances like the maintenance of law and order, counterinsurgency and anti-terrorist operations. Secondly, the army's control over the BSF would have political implications. At a time when internal security duties have become almost a permanent occupation of the BSF, it will amount to increasing army interference in internal affairs. The more important challenge, therefore, is to ensure better coordination, compatibility in tactical doctrine and combat procedures.

V. Performance

As discussed earlier, the BSF works under various limitations. It does not enjoy exclusive jurisdiction even in the primary area of its operations. Therefore, any assessment of the performance of the BSF needs to take into account the overall policy framework within which the Force operates. This includes the assessment of threat perception and how the government uses all its instruments in dealing with such threats.

The BSF is deployed along the vast stretches of India's borders. This includes the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh land borders,
some part of the India-Myanmar border, and the river borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh. The pattern of deployment is given below.

Table No. 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Border/LOC</th>
<th>Total length (Km)</th>
<th>Deployment of the BSF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Line of Control (LOC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>India-Pakistan Border</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jammu</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>187.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>553</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>1037</td>
<td>1037</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2296</td>
<td>2285.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India-Bangladesh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>2216.7</td>
<td>2216.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
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<td>262</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
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<td>Tripura</td>
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<td>Mizoram</td>
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<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4095.7</td>
<td>4095.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>India-Myanmar</td>
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<td>1398.85</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Source: BSF, A booklet prepared by the Public Relations Officer, BSF).

The normal method of guarding the land border is demarcating the entire continuum of the border with small self-contained defensive Border Outposts (BOPs) with specific areas of responsibility. The strength of a BOP varies, from one Section to one
Company, depending on the sensitivity of the area. The normal tactics employed by the BOP are patrolling and static deployment, the purpose of which is to deter the potential criminals through a show of strength. The entire exercise is preventive in nature.

The porous borders of India have encouraged two types of crime: Smuggling, and illegal infiltration and migration. Earlier, smuggling was considered an economic crime, with no major security implications. Mostly, essential commodities were smuggled into or out of India. The smuggling of gold and narcotics did occur, but were carried out done by criminals with no intent to destabilise India. The pattern of smuggling changed during the militancy in Punjab. Pakistan played a vital role in encouraging the smuggling of arms, ammunition and large consignments of narcotics and gold into India. This smuggling was carried out by well-organised groups with active links to militant organisations. In Jammu and Kashmir also, large quantity of arms and ammunition were smuggled to sustain the militancy. The relationship between narcotics smuggling, small arms proliferation, and militant organisations had far-reaching implications for security.

67 Surindur Singh n.7, p.126.
68 R. Sharma, Interview, n.58.
Large scale migration into India also has had far reaching security implications. About 35 to 40 million people have reportedly crossed the borders since 1947. In some parts of Assam, Tripura, West Bengal and Bihar, the amount of migration has been so huge that it has changed the demographic profile of several districts. Apart from putting pressure on local resources, these illegal migrants have carved out separate political interest in the area with the active connivance of local politicians. This has given rise to severe political conflicts particularly in Assam and Tripura. This migration often takes place through well organised gangs with support from local administration, police and the security forces. They create numerous problems in border areas. S.K. Ghosh writes

"The importance of the problem lies in the fact that many of the infiltrators are smugglers and prone to crimes such as dacoity, cattle lifting, peddling of narcotic drugs, gun running, trafficking in women and girl and are actively helping terrorist activities in our bordering States. They also run missions for their intelligence agencies and many of them have been known to have settled down as Hindus in India and are involved in espionage work for their countries. They have many relations in India who derive benefits from their clandestine operations. For them, the border is the main business area. They not only provide shelter and food for infiltrators, but all help needed to remain unnoticed. The problem of untraced Bangladeshi and Pakistani nationals become serious as they merge with the local people and pass off as Indian citizen. They are also able

70 Brig. Satbir Singh, n.57.
71 Ibid.
to gain over the local police and security forces by bribing them heavily. 73

Since the 1980s, the character of such infiltration has changed remarkably. The incidents of armed infiltration have increased. Militant organisations like National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the Meitei extremist organisation namely the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (RPK), and Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) have bases in neighbouring countries. 74 In Jammu and Kashmir today the movement is sustained by organisations like Lashkar-e-Toiba and Harkat-Ul-Mujahideen operating from Pakistan. The foreign component of the militancy is as high as 75%, most of them being Pakistani. 75 The Annual Report of the Ministry of Home Affairs for 1998-99 "There has been a significant change in the nature of militancy. Foreign mercenaries from across the border now dominate the scene giving Pakistan a stronghold over prominent secessionist groups which are being used by the ISI for bringing in a communal divide." 76

73 S.K. Ghosh, n.1, pp.ix-x.
75 Vinay Kumar, "More Pak Militants Sweaking" in The Hindu (New Delhi), 23 May 2000.
76 Ministry of Home Affairs, Annual Report, 1998-99, p.1..
All this suggests that border security is no longer simply a matter of normal policing along the borders. Moreover, border crimes are no longer localised in nature. They have far reaching repercussions for internal security. Alarmed by the linkage between border security and internal security, the government, in 1986-87, formulated a five-year programme to strengthen security measures along the border. The programme envisage raising 60 more battalions of the BSF, establishment of more Border outposts, construction of more observation posts and towers, and equipping the BSF with more sophisticated anti-infiltration device. Since the Punjab's international border was the prime concern at that time, it was decided to fence the entire 544 kilometer stretch of the border. The fence is a mass of coiled barbed wire better known as 'concertina' with four cobra wire running through it. One of these is electrified. The fence also has cattle bells which go off everytime there is an intrusion. In 1988-89 the government decided to fence the Indo-Bangladesh border - 58 km in Assam, 55 km in West Bengal, 66 km in Meghalaya and 19 km in Tripura. It was also decided to issue

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78 R. Sharma, n.68, p.44.

photo identity cards to people living in the border areas. A pilot project was initiated in Rajasthan and Punjab. Though the enhanced presence of the BSF with modern devices and the fencing in Punjab helped bring down the amount of smuggling and infiltration in that state, its overall impact was not encouraging. The volume of seizures and arrests by the BSF on borders between 1990 and March 1999 suggest that the extent of crime is still significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borders</th>
<th>Seizures (in crore)</th>
<th>Arrests</th>
<th>Militants killed</th>
<th>Arms recovered</th>
<th>Animations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Border</td>
<td>297.90</td>
<td>67477</td>
<td>1170</td>
<td>2369</td>
<td>459693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Border</td>
<td>430.15</td>
<td>251818</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>9765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: BSF, A booklet prepared by the Public Relations Officer, BSF).

According to some experts, the amount seized by the BSF is only a small fragment of the crime taking place.

Why has the increased presence of the BSF not been able to curb the amount of smuggling or infiltration? There are several reasons for this. First, the policy was in response to the ongoing crisis in Punjab. It was not a result of a comprehensive border security policy. As a result, the fencing in Punjab forced the criminals to change their modus operandi. Intelligence officials maintain that fencing in Punjab resulted in increased infiltration.

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50 Ibid.
through Kutch, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, and even Nepal. Investigations in the aftermath of bomb explosions in Bombay in 1993 indicate that the consignment of high explosives had been smuggled through the coastal borders.

Secondly, widespread corruption involving local politicians, security forces and local police is proving a major problem. The nexus is so strong that the Central Bureau of Investigation launched an undercover operation along Punjab's border with Pakistan. The investigation revealed the existence of a multi-crore smuggling racket in drugs, arms, and electronics, in collusion with the officers of the customs, the BSF, the Pakistani Rangers and the local police on both sides of the border. S.K. Ghosh writes “Not a single checkpost is free from the taintacles of touts and anti-social elements who operates from both sides of the border having close links between them. They decide who are to be allowed to cross the border and those who are to be pushed back. Bribery and corruption are rampant at checkposts.” Similarly, the impact of migration is underplayed by the political parties. Thus, an agency like the BSF is severely

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62 Ibid., p.62.
63 Ibid., p.10.
64 Ibid, p.10.
handicapped in the absence of a proper border management policy.

The above discussion points to the need to evaluate border management policies and techniques. Border management, today, is a vital component of internal security management. Therefore, the role of the BSF need to be located within that broader framework. There is a need to reexamine the technology-manpower equation within the BSF, and new technological inputs like increased aerial surveillance or use of ground sensors should be inducted. Above all, there is a need for long-term planning as the ad hoc responses to immediate threat provide only short-term relief.

The only war India has fought since the creation of the BSF is the 1971 war with Pakistan. It was the BSF’s first opportunity to work shoulder to shoulder along with the army. On all fronts, the BSF bore the initial brunt of the onslaught of the Pakistan army. Impressed by the performance of the BSF, K. Subrahmanyan observed that “It is interesting to speculate that had we such sophisticated instruments of policy as the BSF to be deployed on our northern borders in 1962, whether we would not have been able to reduce considerably the political cost of these developments.” Quoted in Surindur Singh, n.7, p.86.

Indira Gandhi acknowledged this role of the BSF: “As the first line of defence, the Border Security Force had to bear the immediate brunt of
the enemy onslaught. The manner in which they faced the fire and support they gave to the Army played a crucial role in our success."\(^{85}\)

On the western front in Jammu and Kashmir, the BSF held many of the toughest areas independently and captured large chunk of enemy territories on its own. In the Poonch and Rajouri area, it effectively assisted the army in preventing infiltration and held some important pickets against Pakistan's attack. In the Chhamb area, the BSF bore the initial attack by the Pakistani army and later assisted the army in foiling the attack. In Punjab, where some of the fiercest battles were fought, the BSF troops held the BOPs to the last and, in a number of cases, recaptured posts which had been overrun. In the Rajasthan sector also, the BSF captured a large chunk of Pakistani territory in Shakargarh and played a decisive role in the famous battle of Longewala.\(^{87}\)

On the eastern front, the BSF had the difficult task of managing the refugee influx from erstwhile East Pakistan. Also, the Force launched many raids deep into enemy territory to destroy/disrupt enemies and their supplies/communications. This war of attrition launched by the BSF along with the Mukti Bahini eroded the morale of an otherwise motivated army against whom the ultimate offensive


\(^{87}\) BSF, a booklet prepared by the Public Relations Officer BSF.

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was launched by the Indian army. The BSF conducted many independent operations and not only captured areas but also carried out a number of mopping up operations along with the army. Besides, the small water-wing, with two slow-moving tugs and three small patrol boats, stopped the Pakistani army along the riverine border in the Sunderbans.\textsuperscript{88}

In addition, BSF personnel, by virtue of their prolonged deployment along the international border, were able to collect precise information regarding enemy dispositions, other information of strategic importance, and, in many cases, advance information of enemy plans. They were used by the army as guides also. Praising the role of the BSF, Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw wrote, "During the 1971 conflict, the Border Security Force and Army worked shoulder to shoulder in a spirit of camaraderie and cooperation for which a great deal of credit must go to the men and unit commanders of the BSF in the field."\textsuperscript{89}

Counterinsurgency and Anti-Terrorist Operations

The BSF's use in counter-insurgency operations started in 1967, when two battalions were raised in Manipur to curb insurgency. This required operations in the interior parts of these

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
states against the underground Mizo National Army and the political wing called the Mizo National Front. The BSF was deputed in Manipur also, which has a sizable population of Naga and Mizo tribes. Insurgency in Nagaland and Mizoram affected Manipur until 1980, when the Meiteis of the Manipur valley took up arms.

The BSF’s most important contribution was in Nagaland when it carried out a unique experiment of raising one battalion from Nagaland. Preference was given to those Naga youth who had abandoned the path of violence and wanted to join the mainstream. The advantage of this experiment was that this battalion was able to develop an effective intelligence network and was successful in putting immense pressure on the underground rebels. 90 In 1973, two additional battalions were raised comprising ex-underground rebels of the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland who had agreed to join the mainstream. These ex-underground rebels adopted a different operational strategy which was fairly successful. First, they gave more importance of psychological warfare. Their long association with underground activities enabled them to understand the rebel psychology in a better way which they used in persuading their erstwhile friends to come overground. 91 The rebels were given the

90 Surindur Singh, n.7, pp.188-196.
91 Ibid.
option either joining the BSF or seeking assistance of the BSF get honourable rehabilitation. Secondly, their familiarity with the terrain and local language helped them prepare a proper strategy. Thirdly, they were able to ensure better coordination with the local administration. They mixed well with the local population and were not perceived as outsiders. Lastly, they paid proper respect to the local culture, customs and religious practices. A combination of these measure contained the insurgency in Nagaland for some years.\footnote{Ibid.} Unfortunately, the political leadership could not capitalise on these early successes which indicates basic flaw in the counterinsurgency strategy adopted by India. The use of force plays only a limited role in any counterinsurgency strategy. Establishment of military superiority gives an opportunity to the political leadership to strike a deal with the rebels for a lasting political solution. The north east has always remained a story of neglect. Later on, insurgency in Nagaland resurfaced with renewed vigour.

In Punjab, also, the piecemeal deployment of the BSF started as early as 1984 to curb the then nascent terrorism. BSF units functioned under the overall control of the Punjab Police. Gradually, terrorism in Punjab rose to such a level that the government was forced to induct nearly one-third of the BSF in Punjab. To manage
such a large deployment, the special post of one IG (Internal Security) duties and two DIGs (Internal Security) duties were created. One remarkable feature of anti-terrorist operations in Punjab was that, separate areas of operation were assigned to different security forces. Under this plan the BSF was given Gurdaspur and Ferozpur districts and the riverine belt of Mand (Kapurthala district).\textsuperscript{93} The advantage of this system was that better accountability was ensured and the commandant could formulate appropriate tactics to achieve maximum success.

At present, 45 battalions of the BSF are deployed for internal security duties. Out of this, 41 battalions are operating in Jammu and Kashmir.\textsuperscript{94} The BSF is working there within Unified Command under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister. This Unified Command is responsible for coordinating and sharing security related intelligence, coordinating operations and deployment of security forces. At a lower level, the district administration coordinates with security forces to counter terrorist activities. At the higher level, an Operation Group under the chairmanship of Special Secretary (Jammu and Kashmir) has been set up in the Ministry of Home Affairs to have a periodical review of the security situation in Jammu

\textsuperscript{93} Interview, n.58.
\textsuperscript{94} Border Security Force, n.87.
and Kashmir including the intelligence inputs, deployment of paramilitary forces and coordination of efforts by various agencies working in the field.

An analysis of the BSF's use in counterinsurgency and anti-terrorist operations suggests that this responsibility has become or permanent a and a new response need to be evolved. At present, two factors are influencing the performance of the BSF. First, the overwhelming opinion within the Force that such duties one not their primary commitment. The impact of this feeling has been discussed in an earlier section, secondly, the absence of a unified counterinsurgency doctrine, which results in different methods and approaches in different states. This often leaves the Force directionless and the unit commander acts according to his discretion. The result is confusion among various agencies working in the field.

VI. Conclusion

The BSF was created at a time when border security had a limited connotation. It envisaged guarding the international border during peace time. There were no major military threats from those sectors of the borders which were well demarcated and were not disputed. Border crimes wee local phenomenon with no major security ramifications. Over the years, borders became happening
places. The deteriorating security environment within India and its neighbourhood have thrown a number of challenges to border security. The pattern of crime changed and there developed a complex relationship between border security and internal security environment. The BSF responded to these challenges by augmenting its strength and increasing firepower and modern equipment. But there was no simultaneous articulation of a sound long term border management policy. This gap affected the performance of the Force. Also, since the 1980s there was frequent deployment of the BSF for internal security duties without taking into account its impact on the organisation, its orientation and training. This role deviation has affected the BSF in a number of ways.