

Secret Indian Army unit implicated in anti-constitutional acts

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A huge controversy has erupted within India's ruling elite over revelations of illegal acts carried out by a secret military intelligence unit set up by the previous Indian Army chief, General V.K. Singh, in 2010.

According to reports published in the *Indian Express* last week, the Technical Services Division (TSD): attempted to engineer the ouster of the elected government of Jammu and Kashmir (India's northernmost and only majority-Muslim state); spied on politicians and Ministry of Defence officials; and mounted a dirty tricks campaign to derail the appointment of Singh's successor.

The *Indian Express* says its account of the unit's activities is based on a report made by a high-level Army investigative team that was forwarded to the Ministry of Defence along with a recommendation for a criminal investigation last March.

The newspaper says the army inquiry found that under V.K. Singh's supervision "secret service funds" were used "to destabilise the Omar Abdullah government in Jammu and Kashmir, to pay off an NGO [to make allegations of criminality against another top army officer and, thereby] change the line of succession in the Army top brass," and to purchase "off-air interception equipment to conduct 'unauthorised' covert operations."

There have been suggestions in the Indian press that India's ex-army chief may have targeted Abdullah—whose National Conference is part of India's Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance coalition government—because he urged the repeal of the *Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act*. Passed in 1990, this legislation gives the army sweeping powers in Jammu and Kashmir, where an anti-Indian government insurgency erupted after the central government rigged state elections in 1987, and

has provided legal cover for massive human rights abuses, including summary executions and kidnappings.

The army apparently shut down the TSD after Singh's retirement in May 2012. But from all reports, the government has taken no further action, despite having had the results of the Army's inquiry in its hands for the past six months. And despite the fact that the current Army leadership has in effect charged the previous Army Chief of establishing a secret intelligence unit to defy and subvert India's civilian authorities.

In response to the *Indian Express* articles, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) issued a statement saying the army's report on the TSD was still under review. "The report," said the MOD, "impinges on matters of national security and, as such, the government will take a decision and further action after a careful examination of the report." It added that the government has measures in place to prevent "undesirable activities."

When asked whether the matter would be referred to India's Central Bureau of Investigation—as the army has itself recommended—the MOD said it had yet to decide whether a criminal investigation is warranted.

India's military is usually loath to having outside agencies such as the CBI scrutinize its affairs. That it has urged the CBI be charged with mounting a criminal investigation into the activities of the now-defunct TSD is an indication of the seriousness of the illegal actions it uncovered. It also suggests that the current army leadership does not have confidence that the military and MOD can be trusted to investigate this matter fully and to hold Singh and others to account.

What is incontrovertible is that the MOD and India's Congress Party-led government are determined to shield the criminal and anti-constitutional activities of

the army from any sort of public scrutiny. That is why they have sat on the Army report for the past six months and now that some of its findings have been revealed in a press exposé are striving to downplay the affair and to continue covering it up.

The MOD and government have refused to confirm any of the allegations against V.K. Singh and the TSD, let alone make the Army report public. Nor will they commit to any timeframe for responding to the report or to making that response public.

India's official opposition, the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has charged the Congress Party of leaking the army investigative report to the *Indian Express* so as to sully V.K. Singh's reputation just days after he appeared alongside their party's prime ministerial candidate in the 2014 elections, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. "The Congress-led UPA government is troubling eminent personalities who want to join the BJP," declared party president Rajnath Singh.

While it cannot be excluded that someone in the crisis-ridden Congress government gave the report to the *Indian Express*, elements within the army top brass frustrated at the government's inaction are a more likely source of the leak.

In any event, the actions of India's two principal parties complement each other. The BJP serves as V.K. Singh's attorney, immediately dismissing the allegations that he subverted the constitution as Congress slurs; while the Congress seeks to sweep the entire affair under the rug, so as to keep the Indian public in the dark as to the ultra-reactionary forces that are developing within India's military.

This is a military, it need be added, that has been lavished with massive budget increases and new weapon systems for the past fifteen years and which, recognizing its growing importance to the Indian bourgeoisie's ambitions to become a "world power," has become ever-more assertive. Repeatedly in recent years, Indian generals have issued bellicose anti-Chinese and anti-Pakistani statements that appear to be at odds with the stated policy of the civilian government.

During his tenure as Army Chief, V.K. Singh repeatedly clashed with the UPA government. This included making an unprecedented appeal to the Supreme Court to delay his mandatory retirement for

one year, on the grounds that the birthdate on his army record was wrong.

The launching of Singh's Supreme Court appeal directly preceded an incident that caused the MOD to fear that a military coup might be underway. According to press reports, on the night of January 16-17 2012, the MOD became concerned when mechanized infantry and paratrooper units carried out manoeuvres near the capital, New Delhi. Standard procedure calls for the MOD to be informed of such manoeuvres; however, for reasons that have never been explained this was not done.

Two months later Singh was again plunged into the thick of controversy when a letter he had written to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was leaked by him or his aides. The letter charged that due to government delays in the procurement process the military's modernization program was way behind and the army was, as a result, "unfit for war."



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