

Indian government covers up military's anti-constitutional activities

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Over the past month a series of Indian media reports and comments by retired Indian Army chief V. K. Singh have revealed that the Indian army has been engaged in numerous illegal and unconstitutional activities, including attempting to overthrow an elected state government, bribing politicians, and bugging Ministry of Defence officials.

The Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has responded to these explosive revelations with indifference, issuing pro forma statements that the matters are being investigated and that appropriate action has and will be taken.

The government's concerted attempt to suppress public interest in the revelations is all the more remarkable given that V.K. Singh, who is at the center of the allegations of wrongdoing, is a longtime government opponent. Not only did he repeatedly butt heads with the Congress-led UPA while army chief, he has openly identified himself with the Congress' chief rival, the BJP, appearing last month alongside the BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi, at his maiden campaign rally.

On Sept. 20, *The Indian Express* published a report revealing that V.K. Singh had set up a secret intelligence unit reporting directly to him that had sought to use bribery to bring down the elected state government of Jammu and Kashmir, paid an NGO to sully the reputation of his successor with a view to derailing his appointment, and bought "off-air interception equipment" to conduct "unauthorized" covert operations, including eavesdropping on the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

The *Indian Express* exposé was based on the findings of a high-level army inquiry ordered by Bikram Singh, who became army chief in May 2012 after V.K. Singh retired.

The army had forwarded its findings to the government way back in March. So alarmed was the army's top brass by the transgressions, it asked the government to order an investigation by the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation), an agency charged with probing criminal activities by top officials and institutions.

In doing so, the army took a virtually unheard-of step; the military has always been loath to allow "outsiders" to "intrude" on its affairs. That it did so suggests that it does not have confidence in the willingness or ability of either the military or the MOD to lay bare what has happened and punish the guilty.

The government, however, apparently saw no urgency in acting on the army report and has thus far refused to say what if anything it has done in response to it.

When reporters enquired as to the MOD's reaction to the *Indian Express* exposé, an MOD spokesperson stated: "The [army] report impinges on matters of national security and, as such, the government will take a decision and further actions after a careful examination of the report."

In response to a supplementary question, the MOD official said no decision has been taken on whether to ask the CBI to investigate the patently illegal and unconstitutional activities of the secret army intelligence unit.

That the government has yet to carry out a "careful examination of the report" after the passage of a half-year indicates that it intends to bury the matter. At most it will carry out a few changes in appointments and procedure, in secret and in close consultation with the military top brass.

What is incontrovertible is that the government wants to keep the Indian people entirely in the dark as

to the anti-democratic conspiracies that are developing from within the country's national-security apparatus. Similarly, the Indian government and press have refused to conduct any serious examination of the ties that have developed between current and retired military personnel, including officers, and violent Hindu supremacist groups. (See: India army officers linked to Hindu supremacist terrorism)

Soon after the appearance of the *Indian Express* article and in an attempt to explain away the giving of money to a Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) politician by the secret army intelligence unit under his supervision, V. K. Singh said that the army has long used secret funds to bribe J&K ministers. Moreover, he added, this has been standard practice since India gained political independence from Britain in 1947.

India's only Muslim majority state, Jammu and Kashmir has been convulsed by an anti-Indian insurgency since 1989. The Indian army has combatted this insurgency, which erupted in response to the central government's flagrant rigging of the 1987 state election, with all-manner of anti-democratic methods, including torture, disappearances and summary executions.

"The Army," said the ex-Army Chief V.K. Singh, "transfers money to all the ministers in Jammu and Kashmir... there are various things to be done. As part of the stabilising factor in Jammu and Kashmir, as part of the activities to be organized."

When asked whether the secret army unit under his immediate command had used its funds to bribe J&K Agriculture Minister Ghulam Hassan Mir as alleged by the Army probe, V K Singh said, "If such a possibility is there, I am sure there must be a reason for a particular transaction or number of transactions to this person."

V.K. Singh added that the army has doled out these funds, from secret slush funds, without the knowledge, let alone oversight, of its ostensible civilian overlords. When questioned about whether the use of such funds had the approval of the Minister of Defense, Singh bristled, demonstrating his contempt for the subordination of the military to civilian authorities. "He doesn't have to be aware of it. He has given us a task and we carry it out."

Singh's remarks caused an outcry in Jammu and Kashmir, where the political elite felt compelled to

demonstrably protest against the claim that they were routinely accepting army bribes.

The Congress-led central government, by contrast, has ignored them. This is in keeping with its attempt to suppress all public discussion of the anti-constitutional activities of sections of the military.

When the *Indian Express* exposé appeared, the BJP leaped to V.K. Singh's defence. It charged that the government had leaked the army report so as to smear the ex-army chief after he had indicated his support for Modi. The Congress responded by saying it would never use such tactics as they would harm "national security."

However, after V.K. Singh revealed that the army had long been bribing politicians in Jammu and Kashmir, the BJP thought it politic to distance themselves from him, as this revelation was seen as damaging to India's efforts to legitimize its rule over the state, which is claimed by India's arch-rival Pakistan.

The Congress government's opposition to exposing and alerting the Indian people as to the anti-democratic and unconstitutional activities of military leaders reveals its indifference and hostility to fundamental democratic rights. It fears exposure of these activities would undermine the popular legitimacy of the military and at the very least undermine support for it and the Indian elites' plans to massively expand India's armed forces. The Indian bourgeoisie views an expanded military—including a blue-water Indian Ocean navy and a sea, land and air nuclear strike force—as pivotal to realizing its great power ambitions. Moreover, it recognizes the military as the ultimate bulwark of its class rule. Under the UPA government's Operation Greenhunt, the military has taken an increasingly important role in directing the government's campaign to defeat a Maoist-led tribal insurgency in some of India's remoter highland and jungle regions.



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