

India's government lies about 2012 military coup fears

Kranti Kumara
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India's Congress Party-led government continues to cover up and lie about its fears that an unauthorized January 2012 army exercise was in fact an attempted military coup.

Fearing that then army head General V.K. Singh had ordered two army units to move towards the national capital New Delhi on the night of January 15-16, 2012 with an ulterior motive, a panicked Indian government ordered the exercise immediately be terminated and the soldiers involved returned to their barracks.

Yet the government continues to adamantly deny that it ever feared for the loyalty of sections of India's military and is otherwise covering up evidence that India's military is incubating extreme rightwing anti-democratic forces.

The government's concerns about the 2012 army maneuver were no doubt connected to the fact that later on January 16, 2012 V.K. Singh was scheduled to file an unprecedented Supreme Court challenge to his forced retirement from his army command. *The Indian Express*, which first broke the story about the January 15-16, 2012 movement of a mechanized infantry battalion and an elite paratrooper brigade, recently published an interview with a top army officer that confirms there was indeed great concern in the top leadership of the Congress Party-led government because the exercise had not been given the requisite Defense Ministry approval.

V.K. Singh, who retired in May 2012, gained great notoriety after it was revealed that he had used a secret army unit to spy on politicians and his rivals in the military and a secret fund to attempt to overthrow the elected state government of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

During his tenure as army head, Singh repeatedly publicly clashed with the government. To the government's dismay, he charged that decrepit equipment had made the Indian military unfit to wage a war and claimed that he had been offered a bribe of close to \$3

million dollars to approve the purchase of sub-standard military equipment. Last but not least, there was the dispute over his birth date, which determined the date of his mandatory retirement as army chief.

While the government has ensured that pivotal facts surrounding the unauthorized Jan. 2012 army maneuver remain unknown to the public, the most plausible explanation is that V.K. Singh wanted to send the government a signal by sending troops on maneuvers without seeking Defence Ministry approval.

When the *Indian Express* first published its sensational report of how the government was spooked by the unauthorized troop movement, Defense Minister A.K. Antony dismissed the report as "absolute rubbish." For his part, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh denounced the article as an "affront to the dignity of the armed forces" and, despite the repeated brazen indiscipline of V.K. Singh, declared the army chief's office an "exalted one."

According to the latest *Indian Express* report, so alarmed was the government on that January evening two years ago, then Defense Secretary Shashi Kant Sharma summoned then Director General of Military Operation (DGMO) Lt. Gent. Choudhary to the defense ministry in the middle of the night and told him that "he had just come back from the highest seat of power and that they are worried."

Incidentally, even Choudhary, despite heading military operations, had only come to know about the troop movement the previous day, further highlighting its highly unusual, if not outright conspiratorial, character. Sharma then ordered Choudhary to "send the troops back to the barracks" immediately.

Not entirely confident its order would be obeyed, the government a few hours later asked officials from several intelligence agencies to undertake a helicopter ride to confirm that the troops had indeed gone back to their

base.

The Congress-led government has responded to the new *Indian Express* report with a fresh set of angry denunciations and lies, underscoring that it is determined to keep the Indian people in the dark about its concerns about the challenges to civilian control and outright antidemocratic conspiracies that are developing within the military.

Defense Minister Antony claimed there was nothing new in the latest *Indian Express* exposé. Heaping praise on the Indian military, Antony declared, “A military coup in our country is not even a remote possibility and there is no reason to fear about it.”

“From my experience,” continued Antony, “I can state confidently that the Indian military is a responsible force. They talk straight and are not diplomatic, but always abide by the policy decisions taken by the civil government. Matters pertaining to military operations, in the meantime, are handled by them.”

The attempt to overthrow a civilian government in J & K by the army is hardly an affirmation of the military abiding by the “policies of the civilian government,” unless the Congress Party led UPA government itself had a secret policy to overthrow an elected state government led by one of its own allies.

Last September the *Indian Express* revealed that a secret internal army investigation had recommended the government order the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to investigate various illegal acts, including spying on politicians and giving bribes in an attempt to unsettle the J&K government, carried out by a secret intelligence unit set up by V.K. Singh. (See “Secret Indian Army unit implicated in anti-constitutional acts-constitutional Acts”).

The timing of the exposé strongly suggests someone in the government leaked information about the investigation so as to discredit the former army chief after he had shown his political colours by appearing alongside Narendra Modi, the prime ministerial candidate of the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party, at his campaign launch.

But the Congress-led government was quick to downplay the significance of the findings of the internal army investigation. No CBI investigation has been ordered and everything indicates the government has worked with the military high command to prevent the public from learning of the anti-democratic and anti-constitutional acts authorized by the former head of India's Army and now prospective BJP national

parliamentary candidate.

Similarly, the government, aided by the corporate media, has suppressed from the public evidence that the military has become a breeding ground for Hindu communalist forces. It is virtually unknown that in November 2008, a serving army officer, Lt. Col. Srikant Purohit, and a retired major were arrested by the police for having supplied military-grade RDX explosive to Hindu terrorists who were instrumental in setting off a bomb in Malegoan, Maharashtra that killed 7 Muslims.

Behind these flagrant cover-ups lies the Congress government's dependence on, and determination to uphold, the unchallenged authority of the military—the ultimate bulwark of the rule of the Indian bourgeoisie.

Over the past two decades, the Indian elite has become still more reliant on the military to suppress internal rebellion and realize its great power ambitions. In 2009 the government initiated a multi-state military offensive dubbed “Operation Green Hunt” to ruthlessly suppress a Maoist-led tribal rebellion. For the first time the government has deployed Indian Air Force aircraft in support of internal counter-insurgency operations and large numbers of army personnel are now involved in training paramilitary forces in counter-insurgency warfare.

In support of its great-power ambitions the government, whether led by the Congress or BJP, has prioritized the transformation of India into a military power, with an air, land and water nuclear-weapons program and a blue-water navy capable of projecting Indian power across the Indian Ocean. Towards this end the military has been showered with tens of billions of dollars for weapons acquisition even as the government curtails social spending—and this in a country where more than two-thirds of the population must survive on less than \$2 per day.



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