

CHAPTER THREE

THE INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE (ITBP)

This chapter makes an attempt to understand the Indo-Tibetan Border Police in relation to India's overall approach to the question of border management and internal security. The first part of the chapter deals with the origins of ITBP and the circumstances leading up to its inception. The second part analyses the role and functions of the force. The third part describes the organisational structure of ITBP and problems in the present setup. The fourth part examines the changes which took place in ITBP over the years and motives and compulsions behind these changes. The fifth part evaluates the performance of this force not only in the areas of border security and internal security but in environment conservation and in all round development of the northern border. Finally, some broad conclusions have been drawn.

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) is a specialist paramilitary force, raised by the Union government, to guard the Indo-Tibetan border, a border that is 2,115 kilometres long from the Karakoram Pass to Lipulekh Pass and the trijunction of India, Nepal and China. The Force was created in 1962, in the wake of the India-China war to fill up the security vacuum that was prevalent at that time on the India-Tibet border. It was created under the CRP Act,

1949 as a guerrilla-cum-intelligence-cum-fighting force trained and equipped to operate at high altitudes. ITBP thus became the first paramilitary force to be raised after independence. The CRPF which is an older force had its origin in pre-independence India. Since its inception, ITBP has grown as an elite force, capable of performing a multi-dimensional role. Apart from border security, the Force, today, is involved in the management of a variety of internal security problems, viz., counterinsurgency, VIP security, bank security, security of important installations and the maintenance of law and order. In short, it has become an important instrument of internal security management.

I. Origin

India has land borders with four of the seven South Asian countries: Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. It also has a water frontier with Sri Lanka. It has the world's second largest land border with China.¹ In the entire Sino-Indian border, Tibet figures prominently, the Tibet sector of the border is more than four thousand kilometres.² Most of India's land border in the north,

¹ Bhabani Sen Gupta, "India's Borders: Problems of National Security" in D.V.L.N. Ramkrishna Rao and R.C. Sharma, ed., India's Borders Ecology and Security Perspectives (Delhi: Scholar's Publishing Forum, 1991), p.52.

² H. Bhishampal, Central Police Forces of India (Delhi: BPRD, 1998), p.62.

except in Punjab, consists of high altitude mountain area which starts from the Karakoram pass in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east. The Karakoram mountain range is around 2,000 feet above sea level. The communication infrastructure in this area is very poor, and most of this sector remains cut off during the winter months when the temperature normally remains below minus 40°Celsius. Access to Tibet is only through a number of passes. Zojila Pass provides access from the Srinagar Valley to Ladakh, Rohtang and Baraa Pass connect the Kulu Valley to Ladakh, and the Shipkia Pass gives access to Tibet from Shimla.³ The boundary then, passes through Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. There are other difficult tracts in this area giving access to Tibet. The Nathu La and Jalep La passes provide access from India to China and are situated in a narrow neck of land in Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. The terrain, as we approach the frontier, is inhospitable. Further eastward is Arunachal Pradesh.⁴ Not only is the area covered with thick tropical jungles, but the major rivers such as the Darang, the Subarnashri, the Brahmaputra and the Lohit Pass through this area make communication very difficult.

³ P.V.R. Pao, Defence Without Drift (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1970), p.66.

⁴ Ibid., p.67.

All along the Indo-Tibetan border, the boundaries are recognized in a general way by well known physical features, but except for short stretches, it has not been demarcated on land.⁵ The strategic location of Tibet makes it important for both India and China. According to George Ginsburg and Michael Mathos, "He who holds Tibet dominates the Himalayan piedmont, he who dominates the Himalayan piedmont threatens the Indian sub-continent; and he who threatens the Indian sub-continent may well have all of South Asia within his reach and with it all of Asia."⁶ Even though this assessment sounds a bit exaggerated, it does point to the strategic importance of Tibet.

This importance was not stressed in India until the administration in Tibet was weak, China was a weak state, and the means of communication virtually non-existent. The British government in India did not perceive a threat in this sector.⁷ As the Russian empire began expanding into Central Asia, however, the idea of using a weak China as a buffer state between the two powerful empires gained currency. China had been exercising nominal

⁵ Ibid., p.68.

⁶ George Ginsburg and Michael Mathos, Communist China and Tibet: the First Dozen Years (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p.210.

⁷ D. Banerjee, "India-China Relations and Chinese Military Capability" in D.V.L.N. Ramkrishna Rao and R.C. Sharma, eds., n.l, p.84.

suzerainty over Tibet since 1720.⁸ But for all practical purposes, Tibet was autonomous during the last few centuries even though it did occasionally pay tribute to China. The British decided to recognize Chinese suzerainty over Tibet as a part of their 'great game'.⁹ The Anglo-Chinese convention of 1906 recognized Chinese suzerainty. China attacked Lhasa in 1910 and proclaimed its sovereignty over Tibet. The Dalai Lama regained his capital in 1911 and declared Tibet independent. During this period attempts were also made to get boundaries demarcated between China and British India. But because of the fluid political relationship between Tibet and China, these attempts were not successful.¹⁰ Even the MacMohan line which was negotiated in 1914 between India, Tibet and China was not demarcated on the ground.

The situation remained unchanged until 1949 when the communist revolution took place in China and a strong and highly centralized government emerged after decades of civil war. It captured Tibet in 1950. It was during this time that India decision makers begin to perceive a threat in this sector, particularly because China did not recognize previous settlements and the natural

⁸ George Ginsburg and Michael Mathos, n.6, p.279.

⁹ D. Banerjee, n.7, p.68.

¹⁰ P.V.R. Rao, n.3, p.66.

watershed principle and laid claim to vast chunks of Indian territory. Nehru was aware of the threat that China posed, but he adopted a different strategy. He wanted to engage China in a friendly relationship and was convinced that China would reciprocate positively.¹¹ Also, he did not want to divert limited resources to defence and, thereby, hinder the establishment of a strong industrial base.

As a result, the proper defence infrastructure was not built up along the border with Tibet.¹² The logistical problem involved in policing an extensive frontier running through extremely difficult terrain with no means of communication with the plains of India was too formidable a task, especially when India did not have any specialized troops trained to operate in high altitudes.

After China opened the Sinkiang-Tibet highway in 1957 cutting across the Indian territory of Aksaichin, a special study group was set up to review the defence arrangements along this frontier. But no follow up action was taken.¹³ In 1959, the Chinese attempted to push forward their outposts in Ladakh and in certain sectors in the North

¹¹ V.P. Dutt, "Northern Border: India-China Threat Perception" in D.V.L.N. Ramkrishna Rao and R.C. Sharma, eds., n.l, p.70.

¹² *Ibid.*

Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA). As a countermove, small detachments of troops were pushed ad hoc into Ladakh and NEFA simultaneously, and a few armed police outposts were established in NEFA in support of the civil administration.¹⁴ Before 1961, the military authorities had resisted the suggestion of the External Affairs Ministry to set up such posts all along the borders on the ground that it was unsound militarily to fritter away available troops in this manner.¹⁵ In 1961, Nehru and Krishna Menon revived the proposal to set up such posts. The army was in agreement with Nehru's assessment that China would not attack. Thus no instructions were apparently given to the army commanders of the posts nor any plans were prepared regarding the action to be taken in case of an attack by China.¹⁶ Thus, the Indo-Tibetan border remained virtually unguarded till 1962. No wonder that when the border dispute broke out into the open, neither the Indian government nor the Indian military establishment was prepared for a full scale war and India suffered heavily.

There was a detailed reappraisal of India's policy towards China and defence preparedness along the border. Based on the experience

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ B.M. Kaul, The Untold Story (Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1967), pp.279-81.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.318-19.

of the 1962 war, three major loopholes were detected in India's defence preparedness along the Indo-Tibet border. First, there was no specialist force for policing and patrolling the northern border during peace time. Secondly, it was realized that the tribal population had remained cut off from the mainstream Indian population and this state of affairs was being exploited by the Chinese through their propaganda campaign.¹⁷ So, there was a need for proper integration of the border population into the mainstream and the creation of an intelligence network in that area. Thirdly, it was felt that there should be a specialist force conversant with non-conventional techniques of warfare with a holding capacity at various levels to delay and harass the enemy in forward areas and to conduct guerrilla warfare in enemy occupied territory with a view to force them to leave the Indian territory.¹⁸ Also, there was a need for a force to provide security to Intelligence Bureau installations in forward area.

Based on these assessment the Indo-Tibetan Border Police was conceived, initially as a part of the IB, for border policing, intelligence operations and high altitude guerrilla warfare. Thus, ITBP was created as an armed force under the Ministry of Home Affairs on 24

¹⁷ H. Bhishampal, n.2, p.128.

¹⁸ Interview with the Inspector General (Headquarters), ITBP in New Delhi on 8 July 2000.

October 1962. The responsibility for raising and training of the force was entrusted to the Director, Intelligence Bureau (IB) and a Joint Director (IB). Balbir Singh was appointed the Inspector General, ITBP, with A.S. Midha, Deputy Director (IB) as the Deputy Inspector General of the Force.¹⁹ The Force was created under the CRPF Act, 1949 and initially, the Ministry of Home Affairs sanctioned the raising of four battalions (two each for Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh sector).

II. Role

ITBP was raised as one of the armed forces of the Union under item II A list I of the seventh schedule of the Constitution. It reads, "Deployment of any armed force of the Union or any other force subject to the control of the Union or any contingent or unit thereof, in any state in aid of civil power; powers, jurisdiction, privileges and liabilities of the members of such force while on such deployment."²⁰

The role of ITBP evolved out of distinct phases initially it was a part of the IB and its role was: to provide security to IB frontier checkpost/intelligence post to train Special Security Bureau (SSB) personnel, to carry out guerrilla exercises with SSB personnel, to

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The Constitution of India (New Delhi: Ministry of Law and Justice, 1991), p.152.

secure arms of Special Task Force detachments and to give them cover in frontier areas, to form backbone and merge with SSB personnel for operations in enemy occupied areas, to survey the entire length of border with a purpose of selecting suitable sites for border posts and to embark on civil action plan to instil confidence among the border people.²¹

In 1971, the IB ceased to exercise administrative and operational world and ITBP was placed under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The government decided to review the role of ITBP and for this purpose K.F. Rustamji Committee was set up in 1975. The government approved the recommendation of the committee in 1976.²² The Committee defined the role of ITBP. They are as follows: First, to keep a vigil on ingress routes and to prevent border violations in coordination with security forces. Secondly, to provide a sense of security to the population living in border areas. Thirdly, to control transborder traffic, crime (including smuggling) and unauthorized civilian ingress or ingress in coordination with the Intelligence Bureau. Fourthly, to provide protection and all facilities to the IB to coordinate peace and wartime intelligence operations. Fifth, to function under the operational control of the army as may be

²¹ Interview, n.18.

²² Interview, n.18.

required in sensitive areas. Finally, to perform role similar to that of the BSF in a war situation, i.e., maintaining guards 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 capability of ITBP, to deal with protection of vital installations against enemy raids, providing extension to the flank of the main defended areas by holding strong points in conjunction with the army, limited aggressive action against paramilitary and irregular forces of the enemy within the overall plan of the army, acting as a guide in an area of responsibility where routes are known to ITBP, the maintenance of law and order in enemy territory administered under the control of the army, and assistance in control and management of refugees.²³

Internal Security Duties

The ITBP Act was enacted in 1992. Section 4(1) of the ITBP Act says, "There shall be an armed force of the Union for ensuring the security of the borders of India and performing such other duties as may be entrusted to it by the central government".²⁴ The Act gave

²³ Annual Report 1992-93, Ministry of Home Affairs, p.23. Also Giriraj Shah, Elite Forces of India, Vol.II (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1994), p.346.

²⁴ "The Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force Act, 1992" in Acts of Parliament, 1992 (New Delhi: Ministry of Law and Justice, 1992), p.231.

wide range of powers to the central government to use ITBP for other internal security duties. In 1994, the ITBP Rules were framed which added various internal security related roles like VIP security, bank security and counterinsurgency operations. The Union government deploys ITBP in internal security duties under Article 355 of the Constitution which says that the Union government has a duty and, therefore, responsibility imposed on it, to protect every state against external aggression and internal disturbances to maintain the unity and integrity of India. The Union government is expected to use its armed forces for the discharge of its responsibility.²⁶

Legal Powers/Obligations

For effective and efficient utilization of the Force, the central government is empowered to confer power and duties to the members of the Force under various Central Acts such as the Criminal Procedure Code and Customs Act subject to certain conditions and limitations. The sections of the Criminal Procedure Code which cover ITBP members are Sections 130 and 131 by virtue of being an armed force of the Union. These sections provide for initiative taken by the armed forces of the Union including the defence forces. In a public disorder situation, when a gazetted officer of the force finds that he is

²⁶ The Constitution of India, n.2, p.100.

unable to communicate with the Executive Magistrate, he may with the help of 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 and thereby obey his instructions.²⁶

The customs power given to ITBP relate to search of suspected persons entering or leaving India, power to screen and x-ray bodies, power to arrest, power to stop and search conveyance, seizure of goods, documents and things, power to require production of orders permitting clearance of goods imported by land. The sections of the Customs Act 1962 which apply to ITBP are Sections 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 110.²⁷

In the discharge of their duties, ITBP personnel enjoy certain immunities under the Criminal Procedure Code, 1974 and the ITBP Act, 1992. Section 132 of the Criminal Procedure Code says that no criminal proceeding shall be initiated against any member of the armed force of the Union for any act done in discharge of his duties without prior approval of the Central government. It also says that if a member of the armed force of the Union does any act in good faith

²⁶ The Criminal Procedure Code 1974 (New Delhi: Ministry of Law and Justice), p.69.

²⁷ Anjali Nirmal, Role and Function of Central Police Organization (New Delhi: Uppal, 1992), p.131.

or in obedience to any order which he is bound to obey, he shall not be deemed to have committed any offence.²⁸ Similarly, Section 155(3) of the ITBP Act, 1992 says, "Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, any legal proceeding (whether civil or criminal) which may lawfully be brought against any member of the Force, for anything done or intended to be done, shall be commenced within three months after the act complained of was committed and not otherwise."²⁹

An analysis of the role played by ITBP points to a marked similarity with the role played by the Border Security Force in other parts of India's border. Two different organizations have been created to perform almost the same function. Secondly, ITBP was created with a specific purpose but as the Force grew in size its role also expanded. The first major exercise towards defining its role was done in 1976 and then later in 1992 with the enactment of the ITBP Act 1992. With the formulation of the ITBP Rule in 1994, its role was further defined. Thirdly, the function of ITBP requires constant and regular interaction with various military and civil institutions, and there are no definite procedure to institutionalize this relationship. This leave room for clashes of jurisdiction and

²⁸ The Criminal Procedure Code, n.26, p.69.

²⁹ The Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force Act, 1992, n.24.

misunderstandings among multiple agencies working in the same area. For example, ITBP is supposed to perform anti-smuggling functions, but under the Custom Act, ITBP has no power to prosecute or investigate. As a result, there is a lot of rivalry on these borders between custom officials and ITBP.³⁰

III. Organisation

Like every other paramilitary organization, ITBP is an armed force of the Union. The general superintendence, direction and control of the Force is vested in the Central government which exercises control over the force through Ministry of Home Affairs. The command and supervision of the force is vested in the Director-General who is appointed by the Central government. The Director General is a person from the Indian Police Service and joins the force on deputation. In the discharge of his duties under the ITBP Act, 1992, the Director General is assisted by such numbers of Additional Director Generals (ADGs), Inspector Generals (IGs), Deputy Inspector Generals (DIGs), Additional Deputy Inspector General (ADIGs), Commandants, and other officers as may be appointed by the Central government from time to time.

³⁰ Lok Sabha Debates, India, Vol.15, Nos.27-30, 1992, p.131.

The officers and other members of the force are classified, in accordance with their rank, in four categories.³¹ The first category is that of officer. The DG is on the top of this hierarchy. The other officers are the ADG, the IG, the DIG, the ADIG, the Commandant, the Second-in-Commandant and the Assistant Commandant.

Officers holding the rank of DIG or above are not recruited directly. They are from the Indian Police Service. They join the force on deputation and return to their original cadres. The term of deputation is normally five years. Direct appointments, at the officers rank, are made at the level of Assistant Commandant who is a gazetted officer. He is appointed through an all-India written and physical test conducted by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), New Delhi. An Assistant Commandant can reach up to the rank of a DIG if his performance is exemplary.

The second category is the Subordinate Officer. The highest rank at this level is Subedar Major. The others are Subedar/Inspect and Sub-Inspector. Direct appointment is made at the level of Sub-Inspector through an All India examination conducted by the Staff Selection Commission. A Sub-Inspector can be promoted up to the rank of A.C.

³¹ The Indo-Tibetan Border Police Act, 1992, n.24, p.279.

The third category is Under officers. These are the Head Constables, Lance Naiks and Naiks.

The fourth and final category is Enrolled persons other than under officers. These are constables. Direct appointments are made at the level of constable. A constable can be promoted up to the rank of Sub-Inspector or Subedar.³²

The Field Organization

The deployment of the ITBP is largely in three states: Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir. In each of these three states, the force is headed by an officer of the rank of Inspector General. The force is further subdivided into Sectors. There are five Sectors each commanded of a sector Deputy Inspector General (DIG). The Sector headquarters are located at Srinagar, Shimla, Chandigarh, Dehradun and Bareilly.

The field organization of the ITBP is on the battalion pattern. There are two types of battalion in the ITBP: the Service battalion and the Specialist battalion. There are 29 Service battalions and 19 companies of support weapons. They are distributed in five sectors: first Jammu and Kashmir sector with headquarters at Srinagar which covers a total area of 1,750 km; second, Himachal sector with

³² Apart from main fighting force, there are other cadres: Medical cadre, Engineering cadre, Telecommunication cadre and Veterinary cadre.

headquarters at Shimla which covers 200 km in length; third, Garhwal sector with headquarters at Dehradun covers a 200 km long border fourth, Kumaon headquartered at Bareilly covers 145 km border in Pithoragarh district and fifth, Punjab was the last sector to emerge during the 1980s. It has its headquarters at Chandigarh. At present there are four Specialist battalions, viz., the Transport battalion located at Chandigarh, the Telecom battalion at Shivpuri (Madhya Pradesh), the Support battalion at Karera (Madhya Pradesh), and the Supply and Services battalion at Delhi.³³ Each Specialist battalion of the ITBP consists of six Service companies and one Headquarter company. The Headquarter company consists of an Administrative platoon, the Quarter Master's branch, Motor Transport and Animal Transport, a Pioneer platoon, a Radio and Monitoring section and an Education and Intelligence sections.³⁴

The ITBP Service battalions are organized on the lines of army Infantry battalions and are equipped with the same equipment and weapons.³⁵ There are many similarities between the two. First, like an army infantry unit, the ITBP has four Service companies (as

³³ Divakar Prasad, "Defending the Borders on Mountains" in Dr. S. Subramanian, ed., 50 Years of India's Independence (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 1997), p.158.

³⁴ S.K. Ghosh and K.F. Rustamji, Encyclopaedia of Police (New Delhi: Ashish Publications, 1987), p.134.

³⁵ Ibid.

against a standard six Service companies in other paramilitary forces). Secondly, the ITBP Service battalion has an integrated intelligence and operations section to help the Company Commander in the formulation of the tactical plan in war times and to help in collecting information/intelligence of tactical/strategic importance and timely dissemination of all concerned including the army during peace time. Thirdly, like the army service battalion, the ITBP Service battalion has Pioneer Elements (2 field sections) who besides carrying out conventional assigned duties, are expert in mine laying, making high explosive charges and booby traps required for demolition/sabotage works besides taking preventive and neutralization action against similar contraptions used by the enemy. Fourthly, there is one Medical Officer for each of the four service companies, a ratio which compares favourably with the other armed forces including the army. This is in recognition of the extraordinary hazards of service conditions in the ITBP. Fifthly, each platoon of an ITBP Service battalion is more or less self-reliant in the areas of communication infrastructure, logistics and equipment. This facilitates on the spot decisions in the hour of need in inaccessible, remote areas of deployment of the force.³⁶

³⁶ Ibid.

Training

ITBP polices the Indo-Tibetan border. Most of this border is located in the high mountains at attitudes of up to 18,000 feet, where there is little oxygen, practically no vegetation, and winter temperature often are lower than minus 50°Celsius. Considering the hazards and difficulties in this mountainous terrain, the training of ITBP is of a high order matching the professional skills of the Chinese soldiers. Of late, ITBP has been deployed to carry out various other tasks, like V.I.P. security, counterinsurgency operations, and other internal security duties, which require combat capability, high standards of discipline and fortitude. The main thrust of ITBP training is to develop skills like use of semi-automatic weapons, commando operations, clandestine tactical missions, handling of improvised explosive devices, rock climbing, mountaineering and knowledge of survival techniques in snowbound mountains and at high altitude.³⁷ The force has also been trained exclusively in unconventional warfare to meet the challenges of surprise attack and infiltration, to carry out guerrilla operation and stay behind operations in case any part of Indian territory is overrun, and finally to play a complementary role to the army at the outbreak of

³⁷ Giriraj Shah, n.21, p.350.

hostilities, after dealing with the first onslaught of the invading forces.

The ITBP has three training centres: the Basic Training Centre (BTC) at Bhanu, the ITBP Academy at Mussoorie, and the Mountaineering and Skiing Institute at Auli. The Basic Training Centre of the ITBP was first established at Karera, Shivpuri (Madhya Pradesh) in 1962. It was shifted to Kullu in 1977 and to its present location, Bhanu, in district Panchkula (Haryana), in June 1991. The Institute imparts training to new entrants at the level of Constable and Head Constable in areas like border management, and counterinsurgency operations. The BTC has specialized in the training of Instructors in Drill, weapons, PT and judo and, therefore, attracts trainees from various State police organizations and other paramilitary forces.³⁸ It also conducts in-service training of section-level commanders, besides having a separate wing for the training of dogs and horses and their handlers and riders.

The ITBP Academy, Mussoorie, was established in 1978. Directly recruited officers of the rank of Assistant Commandant and directly recruited Sub-Inspectors are trained in this Academy. Since these officers provide leadership to the force at various levels,

³⁸ "Indo-Tibetan Border Police Basic Training Centre" in <http://www.itbpolice.com>, p.1 of 1.

specialized training in counterinsurgency operations, rock climbing, VIP security and identification and handling of improvised explosive devices are given to them. Apart from this, the ITBP Academy provides regular support to the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie, and the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy, Hyderabad, through capsule courses in rock climbing and mountaineering.³⁹ The Academy also organizes specialist training courses for personnel from State Police Organizations and paramilitary forces. It also has a Research and Development wing which specializes in identifying the training needs of the Force and designing various training programmes.

A winter-craft wing of the force was established in 1973 at Auli (Josimath) at a height of 9,708 feet to train ITBP personnel in mountaineering and skiing. In 1990, it was re-christened the Mountaineering and Skiing Institute. Since then, it has developed into one of the premier institutes of the country in this field.⁴⁰ The Institute offers specialized training to the force in mountaineering, skiing, survival at high altitudes, rescue operations, and river rafting.⁴¹ It also attracts trainees from various police and

³⁹ Indo-Tibetan Border Police (Academy), n.38, p.1 of 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

paramilitary organization including defence forces. In addition, the institute conducts pre-Antartica induction training for the Indian expedition in snow/ice craft and survival techniques at high altitudes.

As a part of the Central government's initiative to sensitize security forces on the issue of human rights, the ITBP has taken certain initiatives to inculcate respect for human rights among its members. Various foundational, promotional and refresher courses have been included in the training syllabi in the BTC and ITBP Academy. The latter also runs separate training courses of five days duration for officers and subordinate officers once in a year, with a view to develop instructional capabilities in the trainees to enable them to further impart training at unit levels on the subject of human rights. Sector headquarters also conduct training programmes in their units to educate personnel on human rights.⁴²

The organizational structure of ITBP represents a unique blend of police and military organization. The upper level of the force is dominated by the Indian Police Service (IPS) officer who provides the basic leadership cadres. These officers join the force on deputation which is for a short period. Since they come from a different organization, different work culture, it takes some time to

⁴² "ITBP: Human Rights", n.38, p.1 of 1.

understand the new job, new requirement and new challenges and by the time they are integrated into the system their terms end.⁴³ Also, many police officers who have adjusted to State Police organization find the assignments in ITBP very tough and boring.⁴⁴ Psychologically, they find it difficult to adjust to the new work culture because they know that the assignment is temporary. In this situation it becomes difficult to develop an emotional bond with the new organization, and this affects their performance.⁴⁵ Lower in the hierarchy of officers are Commandants and Assistant Commandants. They spend the full time of their service in the force and thereby develop a sense of attachment with the force.⁴⁶ Their training and physical fitness is also of a high standard and meet the requirements of the force. But in terms of contribution to the force, they are not a part of the decision making structure.

IV. Changes in the ITBP

ITBP was raised as a specialist force to guard the Indo-Tibetan border. It was conceived of as a guerrilla-cum-intelligence-cum-

⁴³ Interview with an Assistant Commandant ITBP conducted in Delhi on 18 August 1999.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Interview with an Assistant Commandant, ITBP, conducted in Delhi on 6 January 2000.

fighting force trained and equipped to operate in high altitude terrains. It was not meant for deployment in internal security operations. Over the years, however, the force has grown not only in terms of strength but new dimensions were also added to its role. At present, ITBP is involved in a number of internal security operations – counterinsurgency, bank security, VIP security, maintenance of law and order, and so on. Though the growth of the ITBP was not as phenomenal as that of the BSF and the CRPF, the changes that took place in the force merit some examination. It also raises some deeper questions. Was there any pattern behind the growth? Or was ITBP a victim of poor management by the Indian state? For that we need to examine the evolution of ITBP as a specialist force under the Central government.

At the time of its inception, the sanctioned strength of ITBP was four battalions. In the same year, a training centre was established at Karera in Madhya Pradesh. The 3rd battalion of ITBP was the first to receive training at Karera and was subsequently deployed in Himachal Pradesh. The other three battalions were positioned at Saharan (Himachal Pradesh), Gwaldam (Uttar Pradesh) and in the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA). The first major restructuring of the force was carried out in 1965, when four new

battalions were raised and trained.⁴⁷ The same year, war with Pakistan broke out, and the Border Security Force was created. The entire question of border security was getting up top priority in national security planning and accordingly the decision to expand and upgrade the ITBP was taken. The creation of new battalions resulted in an enormous workload and to overcome this some officers were taken on deputation from the State police organizations. Also, ex-army officers, Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs) were inducted into the Force. In the same year, a number of personnel constituting the 4th and 7th battalions were transferred to various intelligence organisations. Thereafter, the battalions were reorganized and some regrouping and fresh recruitments were made to bring the battalions up to effective strength. Initially, each battalion was to consist of a company of Tibetans. Later, they were consolidated into one single battalion and were transferred to the Special Frontier Force (SFF).⁴⁸ The battalions raised by recruiting the local population were deployed in the same area because of their familiarity with the terrain. For example, battalions of the Kumaonis and Garhwalis were positioned in the UP sector, battalions of Jats, Dogras and Himachalis were deployed in

⁴⁷ S.K. Ghosh and K.F. Rustamji, n.31, p.136.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

the Himachal Pradesh sector and Punjab borders, and battalions consisting of Assam tribals were deployed in the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA).⁴⁹ In 1967, a number of Emergency Commissioned Officers were released from the army to join ITBP. Also, the headquarters of one of the Deputy Inspector Generals was shifted to Ranikhet and was assigned the responsibility of controlling three operational battalions deployed in the UP sector in addition to the works of the training centre located at Shivpuri.

Another major restructuring took place when R.N. Sheopory became the Director General of ITBP. He submitted a working paper defining the role of ITBP. During the same year, about six thousand personnel of various ranks were confirmed against temporary posts and were converted into permanent ones. Another major reorganization of the Force was carried out in 1978. The training centres and battalions were restructured. The Specialist Training Centre in Nowgong and Advanced Training Centre in Shivpuri were shifted to Mussoorie and redesignated as the High Altitude Defence and Survival Academy. In this Academy, a combat training wing at Mussoorie and a winter-craft wing at Auli were established. The basic training centre at Karera was shifted to Kulu in Himachal Pradesh. Four specialist battalions, i.e., the Service and Company Group

⁴⁹ Ibid.

battalion, the Transport battalion, the Telecommunication battalion and the Support battalion were created according to the reorganization structure. A Central Record Office was also established at Delhi which collected all the records from battalions and training centres and undertook the work of preparation of pay bills for all members of the force centrally.⁶⁰

In the wake of growing terrorist violence in Punjab, ITBP was given the additional responsibility of providing security for the banking sector. For this purpose, the government sanctioned six bank battalions. These six battalions were raised during 1987-88 to provide security for as many as 169 bank branches throughout Punjab.⁶¹

Two battalions were sanctioned in 1990 as temporary additions for internal security duties in Jammu and Kashmir. In 1992, the ITBP Act was passed by Parliament to give a separate identity to the force. During the same year, four more battalions were raised in view of the increasing deployment of ITBP for VIP security.⁶² Two more battalions were raised in 1992-93 to deal with the internal security.

⁶⁰ Giriraj Shah, n.21, p.352.

⁶¹ Ministry of Home Affairs, Annual Report, 1988-89, p.15.

⁶² Ministry of Home Affairs, Annual Report, 1992-93, p.30.

Another battalion was raised in 1994 for headquarter sector. One more battalion was raised in 1995-96.

Table No.9

Growth of ITBP in terms of battalions since 1980-81

| Year | No. of Battalions |
|---------|-------------------|
| 1980-81 | 9 |
| 1981-82 | 9 |
| 1982-83 | 9 |
| 1983-84 | 10 |
| 1984-85 | 12 |
| 1985-86 | 14 |
| 1986-87 | 18 |
| 1987-88 | 20 |
| 1988-89 | 22 |
| 1989-90 | 26 |
| 1990-91 | 28 |
| 1991-92 | 28 |
| 1992-93 | 28 |
| 1993-94 | 29 |
| 1994-95 | 29 |
| 1995-96 | 29 |
| 1996-97 | 29 |
| 1997-98 | 29 |

Source: Sukhdeo Prasad Barnwal (ed.), Military Yearbook (New Delhi: Guide Publications) for year 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-96. Also Ministry of Home Affairs, Annual Report, for years from 1985-86 to 1997-98.

Table No.10

Growth of Manpower in the ITBP since 1985

| Year | Manpower |
|------|----------|
| 1985 | 14,511 |
| 1986 | 21,006 |
| 1987 | 23,419 |
| 1988 | 25,482 |
| 1989 | 29,488 |
| 1990 | 29,504 |
| 1991 | 29,504 |
| 1992 | 29,504 |
| 1993 | 30,291 |
| 1994 | 30,293 |
| 1995 | 30,369 |
| 1997 | 29,275 |
| 1998 | 30,367 |

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Annual Report, Year 1993-94, p.40; Ministry of Home Affairs, Annual Report, Year 1996-97, pp.28-29.

The pattern of growth in ITBP indicates that the growth has not been phenomenal as compared to other paramilitary forces, especially the CRPF and the BSF. During 1960s and 1970s both the CRPF and the BSF grew on a massive scale. The first major growth in ITBP, since its inception, was in 1976 when its roles were defined and a distinct identity to the Force was given. The most substantial change in ITBP in terms of growth took place during the 1980s when 18 new battalions were added to the force, whereas between 1962 and 1980 only 5 new battalions were added. Clearly, the growth during the 1980s was due to the diversion of ITBP to internal security duties. This was a period when the Indian state faced increasing threats from

terrorism, particularly in Punjab. ITBP was deployed for VIP security in Delhi and bank security in Punjab. This period also witnessed the massive growth of other central police forces.

V. Performance

Compared to the BSF and CRPF, the ITBP is a small force which makes it a compact, cohesive, and well-focussed organization. The nature of work the force performs makes it capable of functioning under difficult situations. Over the past three decades, it has been able to maintain its distinct identity. Apart from its basic function, i.e., to guard the Indo-Tibetan border, the force has been used to deal with a variety of internal security problems. In this process it has successfully established its credentials.

Border Security

The ITBP is deployed at forward border posts at altitudes ranging from 9,000 to 18,000 feet above sea level and is guarding approximately 2,115 kilometres of the Indo-Tibetan border extending from the Karakoram pass in Ladakh to Lipulekh Pass at the trijunction of Indo-Tibet and Nepal borders.⁶³ Most part of this border remain cut-off by the surface route during winter months. The border posts are exposed to the furies nature like snow blizzards,

⁶³ H. Bhashampal, n.2, p.128.

avalanches, landslides besides the hazards of high altitude and extreme cold where temperatures normally remains below minus 40°Celsius.⁶⁴ Despite those odds the force not only keeps a constant vigil on the border but also provides a sense of security to the border population.

During the 1965 armed conflict with Pakistan, ITBP was deployed in Rajouri (Poonch) district in the J&K sector to help in the mopping up operation against Pakistani infiltrators. It also helped in protecting the local population in several areas in Rajouri. Though there was no major engagement with the raiders, there was some encounters at the village level. It was due to ITBP efforts that the police station at Cool did not fall into the hands of Pakistani infiltrators on 14 September 1965.⁶⁵ Bundil was secured by an ITBP detachment on 2 October 1965. One of the detachments encountered stiff opposition at Chamiria Command. The detachment captured it after a considerable fight without support. In the same year, ITBP successfully conducted operations against Pakistan paratroopers dropped in Punjab capturing them along with a huge quantum of arms and ammunitions.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Divakar Prasad, n.32, p.156.

⁶⁵ Giriraj Shah, n.20, p.351.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

During peace time, reconnaissance in the Himalayan region forms an important part of the activities of ITBP. The objective of these missions is to discover everything that may be useful from the strategic, defence, and survival point of view. Another objective is to acquaint the troops better with the terrain. ITBP has conducted several deep reconnaissance drives (long range patrols) in the forward areas and has consolidated, analyzed and systematized knowledge of the area where no local communication exists. Bottlenecks and other obstacles provided by the terrains are identified for operational use where all forces including ski troops can engage and be deployed against enemy forces. This exercise also enables ITBP to develop skills in guerrilla warfare to defeat the enemy by taking advantage of the terrain.⁶⁷

Apart from this, ITBP performs anti-smuggling, anti-infiltrator duty in border areas and extends help to local authorities in time of need. Thus, we see that in the border areas, the ITBP performs multiple tasks where it has to coordinate with army and civil authorities at various levels. It creates a situation where parallel and different types of forces operate in the same area with a separate operational command, administrative, logistics, intelligence and communications setup. The absence of unified command and control

⁶⁷ Ibid.

means diffusion of responsibility. This, in the event of border incursion and other emergencies, can cause confusion and delay in taking responsive action.⁵⁸ It also provides fertile ground for mutual distrust and rivalry. Even when the paramilitary forces operating in border areas function under the army's operational command, the arrangement often does not seem to work due to divided loyalties.⁵⁹ The border outposts are likely to report directly to their bosses in Delhi completely bypassing the local military authorities. Therefore, the army has been insisting that it should control the border forces that are supposed to coordinate with the army in case a border clash develops into something bigger, because the ultimate aim of border security is to check the enemy and maintain territorial integrity which, according to the army is a matter of army strategy.⁶⁰ Therefore, the force deployed at the initial stage should be under the overall command of the army. Also, the border forces due to their different outlook, background and training, cannot be easily integrated with the army in a war situation. Moreover, their frequent diversion to police duties makes such integration much more

⁵⁸ G.S. Katoch, "Border Forces: A Blueprint for Reorganization", Statesman (Calcutta), 20 April 1981.

⁵⁹ Lt. Colonel Gautam Sharma, "Paramilitary Forces", Indian Express (New Delhi), 15 September 1992.

⁶⁰ Kuldeep Nayar, "Army wants control over Border Forces", Indian Express (New Delhi), 30 July 1977.

difficult.⁶¹ The leadership to the ITBP is provided by Indian Police Service officials who by virtue of their training find it difficult to operate in the army's way of working.⁶² Border security and normal policing are two different things. For a police officer who has served for years in the plains doing civil policing, i.e., detection and investigation of crime, it is very difficult to switch over to a job which requires exemplary physical and mental toughness, techniques of survival at high altitudes, and training in unconventional warfare.

Another area where problems arise is the existence of multiple intelligence agencies in border areas. All of them have their own chain of command. The entire system of intelligence operations, interpretations, and follow-up action is mixed up. Recently, the Subrahmanyam Committee on Kargil pointed to the deficiencies in intelligence operations in border areas where large scale intrusions went unnoticed for months due to poor interpretation of intelligence inputs.⁶³ One of the motives behind the creation of ITBP was that it would work closely with the Intelligence Bureau and would set up its own intelligence network in border areas, but frequent diversion of

⁶¹ G.S. Katoch, n.58.

⁶² Interview with an ITBP official conducted in Delhi on 10 February 2000.

⁶³ The Times of India (New Delhi), 23 February 2000.

the force to other duties has affected its ability in that field also.

India has a number of paramilitary forces for border security. The Border Security Force, the Assam Rifles and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police all guard international borders in different sectors. The existence of different forces for practically the same work results in creation of enormous infrastructure for different forces. The army has been suggesting for quite some time that the existing border forces should be merged into a unified border force under army control. They should be exclusively for border security.⁶⁴ Their diversion to internal security duties should be avoided and, for that, the CRPF should be suitably modernized and upgraded. The advantage of this system, the army argues, will be that a single ministry will be responsible for planning, coordinating and executing, through a well-knit agency, effective border security. The unified command will facilitate the flow of sensitive information smoothly to a point where it is most needed, and disparities in arms and equipment and tactical approach will be avoided.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ G.S. Katoch, n.58.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Internal Security

ITBP is not trained and equipped to deal with law and order situation. However, increasing threats to internal security, heavy demand on the CRPF and its consequent lack of reserves, reluctance on the part of borrowing States and Union Territories to release the CRPF battalions even after a situation has returned to normalcy, and the need to rush assistance at short notice have contributed to the deployment of other paramilitary forces including ITBP for internal security duties.

By virtue of their training, ITBP personnel are conversant with unconventional warfare. Their ability to work at high altitudes and against extreme odds has made them physically and mentally tough. Therefore, they are well suited to conduct commando line operations. Since the 1980s, the Indian state has faced grave threats from terrorist violence in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. The VIPs, particularly prominent political personalities, were being threatened increasingly, and the existing security cover was not up to the mark. In that situation, ITBP commandos were deployed for VIP security. Today, it has become one of the most important tasks of the ITBP. Also, as many as 174 major branches of the nationalized banks with currency chests and repositories all over the state of Punjab were provided security by ITBP, including the movement of cash

remittances.⁶⁶ In Punjab, the Bank security by the ITBP continued till 1998. Since 1995, the Force has been extensively deployed in Jammu and Kashmir. ITBP is also guarding banks and many vital installations in Jammu and Kashmir, Chandigarh and Leh. Since 1995, ITBP has been entrusted with the security of the Civil Secretariat of the government of Punjab and Haryana. In Bihar, the ITBP battalions have been deployed in anti-Naxalite operations. At present, the force is heavily engaged in fighting terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. The force also provides security to Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi and the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka. It was also the part of UN Peace Keeping Missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Angola and Western Sahara. In addition, ITBP has been providing a great deal of help in terms of logistics, medical cover, wireless communication cover and security to pilgrims in the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra organized by the Ministry of External Affairs since 1981.⁶⁷

There is a general feeling that the frequent deployment of ITBP for internal security/law and order problems will distract the force from its main role. A force which is trained to be deployed in high altitude areas find it difficult to operate in plains. In S. Subrahmanian's opinion, ITBP should be entrusted with protection of

⁶⁶ Ministry of Home Affairs, Annual Report, 1988-89, p.15.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Tibetan borders in all sectors and should be allowed to specialise in high altitude and snow warfare. He feels that the paramilitary forces, though raised for specific purposes in the past due to exigencies of prevailing situations, have taken upon themselves multidimensional roles which have affected adversely their operational efficiency and their professional competence.⁶⁸ The Estimate Committee of Parliament in its Sixth Report in 1996-97, has also argued that the deployment of border guarding forces on internal security matters creates more problems than it solves. It not only affects the training and orientation of forces but also results in duplication in duties and overlapping of jurisdiction.⁶⁹ The Estimate Committee suggested that the government should examine the feasibility of regrouping and reorganising the central paramilitary forces on the basis of their primary functions.⁷⁰ Border security requires different kind of training and approach. Therefore, the basic difference between policing and border security need to be kept in mind.

⁶⁸ S. Subramanian, "Paramilitary Forces: Modernisation is a Must", Tribune (Chandigarh), 3 May 1993.

⁶⁹ Estimate Committee (1996-97), Sixth Report (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1997), pp.4-6.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Environment Conservation

ITBP is in the forefront of the movement for the preservation of Himalayan environment and ecology. The force has taken up in a big way the task of greening the Himalaya region, especially in the Inner Himalayas. Being the only human presence in the forward areas, it has taken on itself the task of maintaining the delicate balance of flora and fauna. Vast chunks of barren areas in the high altitude regions of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have been converted into greenery in planting lakhs of tree saplings. At the same time, ITBP has also started cleaning the trails in the mountain areas which are frequented by pilgrims, trekkers and mountaineers. The ITBP expeditions have collected and brought down tonnes of empty tins and garbage from the mountain trails. Thus, the force is making a unique contribution in the preservation of the environment and ecology of the Himalayas.

Rescue and Relief Operations

ITBP, being deployed in the mountains has developed the expertise in rescue and relief operations in these remote areas which entail different specialized skills of very high standard. It is always first in extending rescue and relief operations in the case of natural calamities. Two recent major relief operations conducted by ITBP were during the massive landslide at Malpa village in the Kumaon

the sensitive nature of our borders, but the shortcomings in the operational and structural aspects of our border forces, particularly ITBP, need to be discussed thoroughly in order to utilize this force more effectively so that it can operate to further overall national security objectives.

Hills in August-September 1998 and in the major earthquakes in the Chamoli and Rudra Prayag areas of Garhwal in Uttar Pradesh in March-April 1999.

VI. Conclusion

ITBP was created at a time when India did not have a specialized unit to operate at high altitudes. Thus it was a part of overall reappraisal of defence preparedness on the northern borders. The deployment of the army all along the mountainous terrain on a regular basis would have put an enormous burden on the army. Also, there were obvious advantage to keep the army disengaged during peace time to keep it in a state of readiness especially when the tension with China was more visible. Thus, the creation of ITBP was in keeping with the requirements of the time. Over the years, ITBP has been able to acquire an identity of its own in terms of the high standard of performance in high altitude mountainous terrain. The strength of the force was kept at a relatively small size. But during the 1980s, the force was deployed heavily for internal security duties, for which it was neither equipped nor trained properly. This reflects the poor management of the internal security problem on the part of the Indian state. The multiplicity of security agencies doing practically the same thing particularly in sensitive areas like the border lands should be avoided. A force like ITBP is necessary given