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# *British Military Information Management Techniques and the South Asian Soldier: Eastern India during the Second World War*

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This article examines the dissemination of military propaganda and the operation of censorship structures within the Indian Army 'units'—a term used in historically contemporary documentary sources to denote regiments, divisions or battalions—serving in the eastern provinces of the subcontinent during the Second World War. Instead of presenting propaganda as merely being misleading information,[1] this work operates with Philip Taylor's interpretation of it being a combination of 'facts, fiction, argument or suggestion',[2] and concentrates instead on unravelling its form and the intent

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[1] The term 'propaganda' has tended to be employed to denote the conscious distribution of fallacious information. The 1957 edition of the Penguin *Dictionary of Politics* describes propaganda as being 'Statements of policy or facts, usually of a political nature, the real purpose of which is different from their apparent purpose'. The term is defined further as '. . . a statement by a government or political party which is believed to be insincere or untrue, and designed to impress the public at large rather than to reach the truth or bring about a genuine understanding between opposing governments or parties'. Quoted in J. C. Clews, *Communist Propaganda Techniques* (London, 1964), p. 4. While notable in historical works in the European, especially the German and Soviet, context, this trend is also discernible in the historiography dealing with colonial South Asia. This is particularly true in the case of politically-inspired polemics, where the term has been utilized to describe the supposed evils of particular organizations. See, for instance, S. R. Goel, *Netaji and the C.P.I.* (Bombay, 1962). But the tendency to equate propaganda with misleading information has also been noticeable in more serious academic studies. For example, Bhagwan Josh employs it to describe the communists' exaggerated and unsubstantiated claims about their strength in the Punjab. See B. Josh, *Communist Movement in Punjab, 1926–47* (Delhi, 1979), p. 205.

[2] P. M. Taylor, *Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 5.

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behind its deployment. Moreover, the often artificial distinction between 'propaganda' and 'counter-propaganda' is avoided, since the many wartime British public relations projects in South Asia that were aimed at contradicting particular enemy claims were very frequently represented as having other concerns.[3] Particular attention is devoted to describing the military's attitudes towards policies of propaganda and information between 1942 and 1945, as these years saw Eastern India, defined in wartime official documents as being comprised of Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, the eastern districts of the United Provinces and the sparsely populated frontier areas bordering Burma,[4] develop into an important base of operations against the Japanese armies located in Southeast Asia. Unlike much of the historiography dealing with the British army in India during the twentieth century, which has tended to concentrate on the nature of specific battles,[5] changes in military organizational and strategic policy, and/or the situation within the country's principal recruiting areas,[6] this article tries to shift the focus to the authorities' attempts to organize South Asian soldiers serving away from their home districts during a protracted strategic crisis. Therefore, significant use is made here of communications sent from the regiments, divisions

[3] This was usually a result of the abiding official belief that propaganda criticizing particularly damaging enemy claims would have the effect of merely advertising such Axis publicity, without guaranteeing any gains. See note by C. M. Trivedi, Secretary, War Department, Government of India [hereafter GOI], 2 Sept. 1943, Home Political Internal File [hereafter HPF (I)] 114/43, National Archives of India [hereafter NAI]. A good example is the military-sponsored 'talks . . . on the economic conditions in Jap-occupied countries. These gave instances of famine in China and high prices in Burma, and were intended as a counter to Jap propaganda about famine in India, though this was not mentioned.' See Appendix A to most secret Weekly Intelligence Survey, India Internal, [hereafter WIS (II)], 12 Nov. 1943, L/WS/1/1433, Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London [hereafter OIOC].

[4] See, for instance, note entitled 'Secret Appreciation of Indian Morale' by the Overseas Planning Committee, Ministry of Information, Government of Britain [hereafter GOBr.], *c.*1942, INF 1/556, Public Record Office, Kew, Surrey [hereafter PRO].

[5] See, for instance, S. W. Kirby, *The Decisive Battles* (London, 1961), and A. Swinson, *The Battle of Kohima* (New York, 1971).

[6] See S. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Berkeley, 1971); S. D. Pradhan, 'Indian Army and the First World War' in D. C. Ellinwood and S. D. Pradhan (eds), *India and World War I* (Delhi, 1978); J. H. Voigt, *India in the Second World War* (New Delhi, 1987); T. Y. Tan, 'Maintaining the Military Districts: Civil–Military Integration and District Soldiers' Boards in the Punjab, 1919–1939', *Modern Asian Studies*, 28, 4 (1994); and D. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (London, 1994).

and battalions operating in Eastern India, to the General Headquarters (Delhi), extracts from which receive significant mention in the weekly intelligence summaries prepared by the India and South East Asia Commands.[7]

## I. The Goals and Characteristics of Wartime British Military Propaganda and Information Management

South Asian troops had since the inception of the Raj been the country's British rulers' first line of defence against internal trouble. While the political upsurge of the inter-war years had only underlined their importance,[8] the Indian National Congress's decision to oppose Britain's decision in September 1939 to involve India in the Second World War, and the Government of India's resolve to crush them,[9] re-emphasized the importance of strengthening the loyalty of the sepoys serving in the sub-continent.[10] The need for moulding their opinion was stressed further by the reverses inflicted on the Allied armies by the Axis forces world-wide between 1940 and 1943, as well as the extremely difficult road taken towards ultimate victory in August 1945. The management of information, it was hoped, would assist the authorities in fulfilling this goal.[11]

[7] The decision to create a separate South East Asia Command, with Louis Mountbatten as its Supreme Commander, was taken in August 1943. The new entity was made responsible for controlling all Allied forces in Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Siam and Indo-China, and as a result, the India Command was relieved of its responsibility for the operations in Burma. V. Longer, *Red Coats To Olive Green: A History of the Indian Army, 1600–1974* (New Delhi, 1974), pp. 226–7.

[8] Tan, 'Maintaining the Military Districts', p. 833.

[9] Secret letter from R. Tottenham, Additional Secretary, Home Department, GOI, to the Chief Secretaries of all provincial governments, 2 Aug. 1940, Political Department [Bihar] General File [hereafter PDGF] No. 69/12, Bihar State Archives, Patna [hereafter BSA].

[10] The measures suggested in this regard included, according to one official report 'Actions to curtail the spread of subversive doctrines and the activities of agitators in villages and trains. . . . Such steps as may be possible to improve and increase pro-government propaganda and foster the growth of a healthy public opinion particularly in regard to the general attitude towards the prosecution of the war.' See report entitled 'A survey of the Sikh situation as it affects the army', *c.*1941, HPF (I) 232/1940, NAI.

[11] See, for instance, *The Welfare Education Handbook: A Manual Designed For The Guidance Of All Officers In The Conduct Of Talks And Discussions On 'Current Affairs'*, Directorate of Welfare and Amenities, General Headquarters [hereafter GHQ] India (1943), Chapter 1, no pp., L/MIL/17/5/2331, OIOC.

The military authorities in the provinces of Eastern India, in the form of the Eastern and the South East Asia Commands, whose activities are the focus of this article, faced other problems as well. It was impossible for the authorities to prevent the Indian soldiers serving in the region from interacting with the local civilian populace. Efforts at hermetically sealing the barracks and cantonments had always been recognized as being unfeasible,[12] as troops would invariably make forays into the towns or villages located near their encampments for 'entertainment'—usually described in the documentary sources as being liquor and women—while off duty.[13] Here they would be exposed to, and in certain cases be affected by, a variety of 'unwanted' influences: rumours, Axis radio broadcasts, nationalist newspapers, visible signs of extreme economic distress.[14]

In addition, activists attached to the Indian National Congress, the Congress Socialist Party and the Communist Party of India made frequent attempts to gain converts amongst the army, and in certain cases even tried to browbeat Indian soldiers serving in the region.[15]

[12] Tan, 'Maintaining the Military Districts', p. 834.

[13] The inevitable interaction between military personnel and local civilians remained uncomfortable, and the basis for several 'affrays' between them. See, for instance, letter from M. R. Sarkar, Sub-Divisional Officer, Gaibandha to the District Magistrate, Rangpur, 23 April 1944, Police Files [hereafter PF] 7/36/44, NAI. Also see report entitled 'Certain allegations against the Military Personnel at Ghoshpur, P.S. [Police Station] Boalmari [Faridpur]' by D. K. Ghosh, Additional District Magistrate, Faridpur, Bengal, 28 Feb. 1945, PF 7/17/45, NAI. Regular investigations about the behaviour of Indian army personnel were carried out and the results were appended to reports forwarded to the Government of India. See, reports on the grievances which were the subject of the [Congress] Working Committee's resolution of 10 July [1942], n.d., L/PJ/8/596, OIOC.

[14] During the famine of Bengal in 1943, which affected the neighbouring provinces as well, military intelligence reports pointed out that troops serving in the region were being exposed to widespread instances of severe starvation and that this was making them apprehensive about the conditions in their homes. See, for instance, most secret WIS (II), 20 Aug. 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[15] Eastern Army reports would often point to 'subversive activities' against troops. One mentioned that the 'underground Congressmen', Communist Party of India activists and members of the Revolutionary Socialist Party were addressing 'leaflet appeals' amongst Indian troops and calling upon them to revolt. It was also pointed out that these trends were primarily noticeable in the 'security soft-spots' like the recruit training establishments and non-combatant units. See most secret WIS (II) 12 March 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. Another review pointed out that the Congress cadres in Assam were 'most anxious' to 'infect service personnel' and that these efforts were 'most obvious' in units enlisting 'townsmen' and 'matriculate classes'. See most secret WIS (II) 20 Aug. 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. Also see, HPF (I) 3/31/42, NAI, for a selection of pamphlets distributed by Congress activists amongst troops during the 'Quit-India' movement of August 1942.

A representative example of the former was a case where two Socialists—Motilal Singh and Govindeo Brahmachary—were arrested after having been found spreading anti-British views amongst Indian soldiers at their 'lemonade bar' located in the Troops' Amusement Park in Ranchi.[16] While the authorities did not experience these difficulties with regard to troops serving in largely uninhabited, or sparsely populated, frontier areas in the provinces of Assam and Bengal, they had to meet other challenges, most notably from Japanese and Indian National Army propaganda transmitted over loud-speakers, dropped from the air or carried in enemy artillery shells.[17]

Before December 1941 any sympathy for 'pernicious persuasions' within military encampments was dealt with through the implementation of 'strict discipline and punishment', a practice that had been effectively used during the inter-war period as well.[18] An integral part of this system had been the official control over the mail sent by, and to, the troops; which was examined, and, when deemed necessary, certain sections were 'blacked out' by censors.[19] However, the system of information control witnessed notable changes between 1942 and 1945. A characteristic structure of censorship was developed in this period, wherein ostensible official intervention was reduced to the bare minimum, even though the examination of troops' mail continued unabated. Thus, while the mention of certain issues of strategic import—like references to the location of troop encampments and details of the movement of armed detachments—was deleted from the Indian soldier's correspondence, he was

[16] Secret letter from P. T. Mansfield, Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar [hereafter GOB] to the Secretary, Home Department, GOI, 10 April 1944, HPF (I) 29/6/44, NAI. Also see, most secret report on 'Subversive attempts on the loyalty of the Indian Army' by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Indian Army, 10 May 1943, L/WS/1/707, OIOC.

[17] Japanese and Indian National Army propaganda dealt with a variety of issues: apart from contradicting the British stance towards political issues it would also often advertise the high levels of pay given in their armies. See, for instance, most secret WIS (II) 23 April 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. During the battle for Kohima in 1944, the Japanese subjected the Allied forces to an 'intensive' propaganda onslaught in the form of 'gramophone' and air-dropped slogans (written in English and Hindustani). See secret WIS (II) 11 Aug. 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. For a description of the content of short-wave broadcasts from the Japanese-controlled stations in the Far-East to India see HPF (I) 51/5/44, NAI. Also see, most secret report on 'Subversive attempts on the loyalty of the Indian Army' by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Indian Army, 10 May 1943, L/WS/1/707, OIOC.

[18] Tan, 'Maintaining the Military Districts', p. 834.

[19] *All India Training Manual*, GHQ, India [hereafter *AITM*], No. 7 (1941), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC.

allowed, and indeed, encouraged to state his fears, or misgivings, about the contemporary political situation, wartime problems that affected his family and particular official policies.[20] An analysis of the Indian Army's weekly intelligence summaries reveals the importance accorded in official circles to monitoring these views, using the knowledge thus harvested to produce regular reports and then making them the basis for military propaganda.[21] The importance of this was underlined by W. J. Cawthorn, the Director of Military Intelligence in India [hereafter DMI], thus:

> The effect of anti-British propaganda and attempts to suborn the troops depends largely on the amount and quality of our counter-propaganda. . . . Through all this period [the war] the responsibility of the British Officer in Indian battalion[s] would be of greatest importance as a counter-propaganda organization; it is suggested that special attention be paid to this aspect of his duties.[22]

The information collected by military censors also allowed the General Headquarters (India) to apprise the relevant District Soldiers' Boards and the civilian authorities about the specific problems faced by military families, which would then be promptly corrected. These remedial measures were then widely publicized in the relevant units. For instance, the apprehension caused among soldiers in January 1942 by an unsubstantiated rumour that the Government of Punjab intended to requisition—without payment—all wheat stocks above 20 *maunds*, was successfully counteracted by articles in the *Fauji Akhbar*, a newspaper distributed amongst South Asian troops, and lectures by Civil Liaison Officers and Unit Commanders, which clarified that the news had been unfounded.[23] Similarly, the fears among soldiers based in Eastern India during the famine of 1943 that their families were starving were 'allayed' by the news of the

[20] See, for instance, *The Welfare Education Handbook*, L/MIL/17/5/2331, OIOC.

[21] See, for instance, Monthly Intelligence Summary No. 1 of 1942, 10 Jan. 1942, L/WS/1/317, OIOC. Also see, most secret WIS (II) 17 July 1942; most secret WIS (II) 15 Feb. 1943; most secret WIS (II) 23 July 1943, most secret WIS (II) 10 March 1944, and secret WIS (II) 22 Sept. 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC; and a note entitled 'Reactions in Indian units to Japanese propaganda' in most secret WIS (II) 31 March 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[22] Most secret note entitled 'The Future of the Internal Security Situation in India' by Brigadier W. J. Cawthorn, Director of Military Intelligence [hereafter DMI], 31 Aug. 1942, L/WS/1/1337, OIOC.

[23] Most secret WIS (II) 27 Feb. 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. Also see, the note entitled 'Reactions in Indian units to Japanese propaganda' in most secret WIS (II) 31 March 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

action taken by the relevant provincial governments.[24] Prompt action was also taken when a security report warned that serving men from Eastern United Provinces were anxious about news of being ousted from their holdings of land, because these had been transferred or sub-let to another person. The military authorities asked the Government of the United Provinces to investigate the matter, and assurances that the provisions of the United Provinces Tenancy Act did not apply to military personnel were advertised to great effect by the officers of the concerned units.[25]

Therefore, the system of information control developed from 1942 onwards allowed the military propaganda created for the consumption of the sepoy to remain 'in touch' with their needs throughout the conflict. Crucially, it also allowed the authorities to discard the ineffective lines of propaganda, while emphasizing, or creating, more effective ones. However, the success of the policy remained rooted in the smooth transmission, rather than the suppression, of information: a fact visible in the shifting attitude within the military establishment towards censorship. Instead of referring to the expungtion of the troops', or their family members', criticisms about the current political or economic scenario, it began to designate the secret examination of their personal correspondence. Referring to this, a Central Intelligence Department officer mentioned that the existence of such initiatives was seldom publicized since it allowed much information of value to be collected,[26] which would seem to suggest that the people targeted remained unaware of the censors' activities.

Interestingly, efforts were also made in this period to generate an 'openness' amongst British soldiers serving in all theatres of war, and the formation of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs in June

[24] The military propaganda distributed amongst troops from the Bombay Presidency serving in Eastern India constantly referred to the special concessions arranged by the provincial authorities in the districts they hailed from. Most secret WIS (II) 30 April 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. A report from Chittagong pointed out that Indian (and British troops) were so 'affected' by the 'sights around them' that they were feeding beggars with their own rations, even though they were disobeying orders while doing so. Most secret WIS (II) 20 Aug. 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. The anxiety among the soldiers from Punjab about the food situation was that there would be a 'heavy export' of food grains from their province and would result in a local shortage. Most Secret Morale Report, Aug.–Oct. 1943, undated, L/WS/2/71, OIOC.

[25] Most secret WIS (II) 4 Aug. 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[26] Recollections of G. R. Savage, Central Intelligence Department, MSS EUR F 161/210, OIOC.

1941 inaugurated these initiatives.[27] But the similarities between the information policies deployed amongst British and Indian troops did not end there. Indeed, in both cases the official initiatives were informed by a combination of a difficult strategic scenario and a changed pattern of recruitment; issues that preyed on, and increasingly dictated, the nature of implementation of military censorship and propaganda. As opposed to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff's, and Prime Minister Churchill's, apprehensions about the British soldier with socialist tendencies,[28] the Indian GHQ's worries centred around the inclusion of the politically conscious 'educated middle-classes': a category used in military files to refer to the urbanites, who were permeating an Indian army that was being forced to adapt to fighting a technologically modern war in ever-increasing numbers. One estimate, made as early as June 1942, declared, for instance, that these 'classes' had contributed 33% of the infantry and cavalry.[29]

The British military authorities' discomfiture about the new type of soldiers arose principally from a recognition of the fact that they hailed from areas lacking the comprehensive civil–military structures—with the entrenched system of District Soldiers' Boards and other intricate systems of control—that had been developed in the primary recruiting areas, especially in the Punjab.[30] Indeed, this factor also caused much uneasiness within the military hierarchy about the unavoidable inclusion into the Indian Army of 'non-martial classes',[31] who were considered 'other than first line' material.[32]

[27] A. Danchev, 'The Army and the Home Front 1939–1945' in D. Chandler and I. Beckett (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Army* (Oxford, 1996), p. 304.

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 298–306.

[29] Appendix E to secret letter from Adjutant General's branch, GHQ (India) to all branches of GHQ, 1 June 1942, L/WS/1/1335, OIOC.

[30] See Tan, 'Maintaining the Military Districts'.

[31] The notion of 'martial classes', despite its apparently blimpish associations and frequently shifting definitions, remained, as a range of wartime documents clearly prove, an important category within the Indian military hierarchy. During the Second World War it was a term used to refer to particular communities like the Punjabi Muslims, Hindu Jats, Sikh Jats, the Dogras, the Pathans, particular Marathi castes and the Rajputs, from which the Indian army had drawn in the twentieth century. Rather than insinuating the presence, or indeed, the lack of military capabilities, the concept of 'martial class' was used to describe people hailing from localities with well-ordered recruitment systems and comprehensive administrative structures.

[32] By November 1942, a million and a half soldiers had been recruited and many of these recruits came from these previously 'untried classes.' The main problem for the military administrators was that the so-called 'martial races' were unable to

While the changed tactics of information management allowed the military intelligence personnel to monitor attitudes in the Indian army as a whole, they were particularly invaluable for determining the needs, and political predispositions, of the new army recruits and their families.[33] In fact, the shift in information policies, and correspondingly, the ostensible lack of security in a difficult strategic situation, appeared to catch certain British military personnel by surprise. One, a Captain W. A. Barnes based in Calcutta, complained in September 1942 about 'indiscreet disclosures' made by troops in their mail and the lack of censorship of such correspondence, and declared:

> That it appeared that a report on the subject might be called for based on a careful examination of a representative batch of such [post]cards, to determine whether the leakage was serious or not, and what action should be taken in view of the fact that unit and field censors appeared to be slipping up in this regard.[34]

Nonetheless, the military intelligence community remained committed to a scheme wherein the comprehensive censorship of soldiers' mail was avoided and all official intervention downplayed; a system which, as a perusal of secret military intelligence reports shows, continued right till, and even beyond, the conclusion of the Second World War.

## II. The Wartime Military Propaganda and Censorship Apparatus

According to J. A. Thorne, the author of a comprehensive report on wartime publicity, the civil and military public relations projects

meet the increased demand in recruitment. Secret memorandum on Indian manpower from the Adjutant General's Branch, 3 Nov. 1942, L/WS/1/968, OIOC. Madrasis (Tamils, Telegus and Malyalis), new Marathi castes, Bengali Muslims and Assamese were taken in large numbers into the mechanized units as drivers. Secret War Department History—Expansion of the Armed Forces in India, pp. 26–33, L/R/5/273, OIOC. For a discussion of these issues in contemporary reports see, for instance, WIS (II) 20 Feb. 1942 and 1 May 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[33] See, for instance, most secret WIS (II) 17 July 1942; most secret WIS (II) 9 Oct. 1942; most secret WIS (II) 15 Feb. 1943; most secret WIS (II) 10 March 1944, and secret WIS (II) 22 Sept. 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[34] Letter from W. A. Barnes to the Commanding Officer, Military Censor Station, Calcutta, 29 Sept. 1942, Barnes Papers, Centre of South Asian Studies Archives, Cambridge.

were separately organized, and the production of propaganda material created for the consumption of Indian personnel remained a jealously-guarded preserve of the military authorities.[35] At the outbreak of the war, the newspapers, bulletins and leaflets, in English and in the vernacular languages, were produced for distribution within the units by officers attached to the Directorate of Military Operations and Intelligence, General Headquarters (India),[36] and this arrangement remained more or less unchanged till the end of the war.[37] A similar trend was also noticeable with regard to the creation of radio and film propaganda meant for Indian troops.[38]

The military authorities' control over their own affairs was strengthened further by the practice of utilizing the structures available within the battalions, divisions and regiments to distribute official propaganda material among serving soldiers. Lectures by commanders remained the most common mode of spreading officially prescribed views, because intelligence reviews reported them effective. One survey pointed out, for instance, that though written literature was not 'fully assimilated' by the Indian soldier since he was 'disinclined to seek such material for himself', he would take the 'keenest interest' in the material 'if it was offered to him in palatable forms as a lecture by his officers'.[39]

The Commanding Officers and their senior subordinates also used loud-speaker systems to disseminate the daily 'news'.[40] Topics which they were expected to highlight were described in detail in pamphlets and specialized publications like *Indian Information*, the *Army in India Training Manuals* and the *War in Pictures*, which were regularly circulated.[41] The unit was also considered to be a suitable place in which to provide troops with 'vetted' printed and wireless propaganda.[42] 'Information rooms' authorized by the officers, would con-

[35] J. A. Thorne, *Confidential report on the control during war of the press, broadcasting and films; and on publicity for purposes of the war* [hereafter *Thorne Report*] (New Delhi, 1939), L/I/1/1136, OIOC.

[36] *Ibid*.

[37] In November 1943 the responsibility for the production of print propaganda for Indian troops operating in Eastern India began to be shared by the South East Asia Command. There were, however, no attempts to involve civilian administrators in this enterprise. Secret telegram from the War Department, GOI to the Secretary of State for India, GOBr., 15 Nov. 1943, L/I/1/1050, OIOC.

[38] Secret war history of the Bureau of Public Information, 1939–45, L/R/5/295, OIOC. Also see, memorandum on film publicity, p. 17, L/R/5/295, OIOC.

[39] Most secret WIS (II) 2 Oct. 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[40] *AITM*, No. 19 (1943), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC.

[41] The *AITM* was issued to all arms of service at the scale of one copy for each officer. See *AITM*, No. 24 (1944), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC.

[42] *AITM*, No. 18 (1942), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC.

tain newspapers like the *Fauji Akhbar* [Soldiers' Newspaper], *Jang Ki Khabren* [News of the War] and *Duniya* [The World],[43] and house wireless sets, which would be switched on at certain times of the day.[44] These rooms would regularly be used as the venue for shows in which 'press photographs, carefully selected, [we]re exhibited under boards under representative headings such as "Air", "Mechanisation", "Weapons" etc . . .'.[45] Films screened by mobile cinemas, slide shows, and plays performed by travelling concert groups and theatre companies were also used in attempts to popularize official descriptions of the war-effort.[46]

The primary structures of military censorship were also developed around the 'unit'. Regimental, divisional or battalion commanders would normally appoint their second-in-command to be the Unit Security Officer, who would, among other things, organize the examination of the soldiers' correspondence and the preparation of 'morale' reports for consumption by the GHQ (India).[47] The extension of the Second World War to Eastern India in 1942 forced the military authorities to develop additional structures of censorship in the region. This was facilitated by the fact that the Indian army's interests had been allowed to dominate, and direct the development of, the official surveillance networks deployed amongst the civilian population from the onset of the war. An army official, the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, guided censorship policy and his influence was accentuated within the central government by the deputation of two army officials as the Chief Telegraph Censor and Chief Postal Censor respectively.[48] They arranged for the establishment of postal and telegraphic censorship in the provincial capitals and the seaports of Eastern India;[49] and officials appointed by them directed operations in the localities.[50]

[43] Secret WIS (II) 3 Aug. 1945, L/WS/1/1506, OIOC.

[44] Most secret WIS (II) 9 April 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[45] *AITM*, No. 19 (1943), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC. Also see, letter from N. Beresford-Pierse, Welfare General in India, GHQ, New Delhi, to M. Mayne, India Office, London, 7 Nov. 1945, L/WS/2/87, OIOC.

[46] Most secret, WIS (II) 22 Dec. 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[47] Monthly Intelligence Summary No. 1 of 1942, 10 Jan. 1942, L/WS/1/317, OIOC. Also see, *AITM*, No. 7 (1941), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC, and most secret WIS (II) 23 July 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[48] *Thorne Report*, p. 16, L/I/1/1136, OIOC.

[49] Most secret letter from War Department, GOI to Home Department, GOI, 10 Feb. 1944, HPF (I) 20/1/44, NAI.

[50] This was despite the fact that comprehensive powers of censorship were given to the local officials through Section 25 of the Emergency Powers Ordinance of 1940. For a detailed description of the legislation, see secret letter from R. Totten-

From 1942 onwards, the military authorities utilized the structures of civilian censorship to buttress the system of information control within army encampments. It was recognized that soldiers serving in Eastern India could, if they so wanted, transmit correspondence—letters or telegrams—from local post-offices. Command over censorship resources in the cities, towns or the sub-divisional capitals allowed military intelligence to plug this potentially damaging weakness. The prominence given to this aim is represented by the fact that the available manpower resources were deployed to develop a permanent scheme of 'internal censorship' primarily in urban areas and localities with significant troop concentrations,[51] whereas the 'continuous' screening of postal communications was avoided elsewhere. Instead, ephemeral censorship structures were established only in localities considered by the army to be of strategic worth, particularly in situations where specific political or economic crises were deemed to be capable of threatening the Allied war-effort. For instance, the outbreak of the disturbances in August 1942 caused the local military authorities to initiate the censorship of internal mail in the troubled localities in Eastern India, which had been declared to be an operational area in December 1941.[52] Comparable measures were also introduced in the region during the first quarter of 1943, when the region was faced with a severe food shortage. Arrangements were made in March 1943 to permit the examination of postal communciations in the 'areas to the south (and the east) of the Brahmaputra river and the east of the Ganges river'.[53]

Security within military encampments was strengthened further by monitoring the activities of newspaper or news-agency correspondents posted in operational areas. The regulations concerning their activities had declared that reporters who accompanied troops on active service could be tried under the Indian Army Act and were subject to military law. In addition, the official regulations declared 'that a license issued by the Defence Department of the Government of India to a press correspondent to accompany troops on active ser-

ham, Additional Secretary, Home Department, GOI to the Chief Secretaries of all provincial governments, 2 Aug. 1940, PDGF No. 69/12, BSA.

[51] Departmental note, Home Department, GOI, *c.*1943, HPF (I) 20/18/45, NAI.

[52] Departmental note, Home Department, GOI, Aug. 1942, HPF (I) 20/18/45, NAI.

[53] The structures of censorship consisted of 'static censor stations' at all the major river crossings and these were supplemented by 'mobile censor units' based at these stations. Most secret WIS (II), 9 April 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

vice only authorises that correspondent to proceed to a specified place, usually the base of operations.'[54] From December 1941, these laws translated into a system wherein correspondents attached to military detachments had their messages examined by the Unit Censorship Officer before transmission. Moreover, articles written on the basis of such information were then submitted to the military's representatives in the civilian press advisory committees prior to publication. This regulatory system was further strengthened by the legal restrictions placed on members of the armed forces regarding statements to the press. The Indian Army Rule 333 stated, for instance, that 'an officer or soldier is forbidden to publish or communicate any statement of fact or opinion which is capable of embarrassing the relations between Government and the people of India or any section thereof';[55] and made the writing of letters and the grant of interviews by service personnel, while on service or during leave, on the strategic or the political situation in India a punishable offence. The effectiveness of this legislation was increased by the utilization of the Defence of India Rule 116 by the provincial authorities, which allowed them to force editors of newspapers to disclose particulars in cases where service personnel had given interviews.[56]

## III. The Themes and Uses of Wartime Military Propaganda

While the wartime military propaganda disseminated amongst South Asian troops located in the Eastern India dealt with a wide variety of themes, some of these were relics of an earlier period, whereas the others resulted from specific recommendations by the DMI's office at particular junctures of the Second World War. In the former category was material aimed at strengthening regimental loyalty by extolling the 'glorious military traditions' of the 'martial classes'; as well as their bravery in the battle-field.[57] The latter commonly took the form of 'counter-propaganda', and was intended to contradict 'defeatist' suggestions made by those considered either 'external' or 'internal' enemies; redress particular fears amongst the soldiers and their families, and accustom troops with new official initiatives.

[54] Secret Censorship Regulations, India, Defence Department, 1939, L/MIL/17/4258, OIOC.

[55] Most secret WIS (II), 30 Oct. 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[56] *Ibid*.

[57] *AITM*, No. 12 (1941), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC. Also see different issues of series entitled *Indian Army in Action* in L/WS/1/1319, OIOC.

Between September 1939 and December 1941 India remained relatively unaffected by the travails of war. As a result, military propaganda distributed amongst Indian troops, apart from criticizing the Congress's opposition to the conflict, tended to concentrate on appreciative descriptions of India's contributions to Allied efforts in the European and African theatres of war. An apt example was the 'War time syllabus for Geography, Citizenship and General Knowledge' for serving soldiers. In this, India's economic and material contributions were consistently emphasized and geography was taught by dividing the map of India 'from the manpower point of view', the 'raw material point of view' and the 'industrial point of view'. 'Citizenship and General Knowledge' were also taught through lessons on war funds, their importance and how they were raised.[58] Pamphlets dealt with similar issues, and a typical example declared that 'The steel industry to-day is working to the limit of capacity, and, as the Chairman of Tata's recently pointed out, is in a position to meet practically the whole of the requirements of India's defence forces for steel . . .'.[59]

The dramatic change in the strategic situation from December 1941 had a series of notable effects: recruitment patterns had to be modified in order to permit the requisite rate of expansion of the Indian army, and Japan's conquest of Burma in May 1942 brought the enemy close to India's borders. Both trends left an indelible imprint on official propaganda policies. For instance, the enforced, and hurried, inclusion of new groups of Indians into the army had a dual impact. On the one hand, it gave the authorities less time to train, and therefore 'indoctrinate', the entrants.[60] On the other, it was very apparent that the new recruits treated the armed forces as a well paid and stable source of employment. Indeed, one intelligence report asserted that they had joined 'not because of any patriotic motives or military tradition', but because the pay allowed them to maintain their families 'in these days of economic stress'.[61]

[58] *AITM*, No. 6 (1941), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC.

[59] G. Dunbar, *India at War: A Record and a Review, 1939–40* (London, 1940), p. 28, L/MIL/17/5/4260, OIOC.

[60] The pre-war system of a nucleus of permanent recruiting staff and the 'ex-soldier paid recruiter' stood well the initial test of wartime expansion. However, the system proved inadequate when the 'real tapping' of new classes began from December 1941, and this forced the military to use the assistance of the local civilian authorities in the recruitment of sepoys. Secret War Department History: Expansion of the Armed Forces in India, p. 26, L/R/5/273, OIOC.

[61] Most secret WIS (II) 30 April 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

Hence, the Commandant of the Army School of Education declared that 'the old loyalty' would need to be replaced with a new 'sense of purpose', and added that for this the 'old form of stereotyped lecture was of little value'. Therefore, he argued, a new 'language' would be required to instil loyalty to the British war-aims,[62] and this would be centred around the 'protection' of Indian 'homes and families'.[63] The frequent reference to the comfortable conditions in the localities from which the Indian troops were drawn were also a result of the military authorities' assertion—on the basis of unit morale reports—that 'there was much evidence that the morale and the contentment' of the Indian soldier, especially that of the new recruits, were 'largely dependent' on the conditions back home.[64] Military propaganda would, thus, constantly highlight the 'positive action' taken by the provincial administrators in the major recruiting areas, and assure the troops that the Indian Soldiers' Board '. . . exist[ed] to promote the well being and to watch the interests of serving soldiers in their civil capacity, and of ex-soldiers, and of the families of serving and ex-soldiers'. Though the prevalence of economic difficulties, when and where they existed, was never denied, it was underlined that the soldiers' families formed 'that part of the civil population' which the authorities were 'specially concerned about', that the organizations created to look after their comforts had been given 'comprehensive powers', and that these were functioning without impediment.[65]

The proximity of Japanese forces to India, and their publicists' regular radio broadcasts from Southeast Asia, had an even more marked effect in determining the themes discussed in British military propaganda. Efforts were made from December 1941 onwards to underline the savagery of the Japanese by making use of 'atrocity stories', which began to dominate the lecture notes sent by the General Headquarters (India) to all Unit Commanders in the country. One set advised that officers emphasize that the entire Japanese army regarded the Indian soldier with 'unconcealed and unwarranted' contempt, which had led to '. . . authentic cases of prisoners being killed out of hand, and of their being used as live targets for bayonet practice'. It also asked them to warn the Indian soldier that

[62] Most secret WIS (II) 23 July 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. Also see, most secret WIS (II) 21 Aug. 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
[63] *AITM*, No. 16 (1942), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC.
[64] Most secret WIS (II) 30 April 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
[65] *Matters of interest to Indian soldiers and their families*, Calcutta, 1943, pp. 1–2.

the Japanese would treat them with 'less consideration' than they would their pack animals.[66] In addition, evidence of Japanese cruelty, in the form of published experiences of escaped prisoners, was circulated amongst troops. One such description by an escapee went thus:

> We were given only one meal a day, consisting of one small cup of rice boiled with green. The food was meagre and insufficient. In the morning we were taken out by the Japanese soldiers to repair the . . . harbour, aerodrome and other military positions and also for loading and unloading goods, and were brought back to the jail in the evening. The prisoners in a barrack were given 15 minutes a week to go to the well, fill mule troughs with water and hurriedly wash their bodies. If they could not finish this job within the specified time they were taken back to the barracks being beaten and kicked on the way. We were asked to ease ourselves in our barracks and remove the night soil personally to a trench. No soap or change of clothes was allowed. I passed the whole time in my own under-wear and shirt which I wore at the time of my arrest. The treatment of [*sic*] the Japanese soldiers with [*sic*] the Indian Prisoners was very rude and cruel.[67]

Moreover, whereas the sweeping British losses in Southeast Asia forced the military authorities to downplay references to the strength of the British and Allied forces, propaganda material continued to discuss the inevitability of the 'ultimate' victory of the 'combination of British, Chinese, Russian and American troops'. It also constantly mentioned that the defences and anti-aircraft gun batteries in 'the most threatened quarters of India' were 'already strong enough to cause the Japanese raiders heavier losses than they have yet suffered'.[68] Senior officers and travelling lecturers were warned by the Military Headquarters at this juncture that they take care not to lower morale 'by the recounting of withdrawals. . . . [or] stress unduly the lack of certain articles of equipment'.[69] The disastrous retreat from Burma was represented amongst South Asian troops as a 'brilliant delaying manoeuvre' which had allowed the Allied forces in India the time to regroup. One description of the event declared that:

[66] Note on Japanese use of Indian Prisoners of War in most secret WIS (II), 30 Oct. 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. Also see, appendix A to most secret WIS (II) 7 May 1943; appendix B to most secret WIS (II) 14 May 1943; appendix A to most secret WIS (II) 21 May 1943; appendix A to most secret WIS (II) 28 May 1943, and appendix A to most secret WIS (II) 17 Sept. 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[67] Most secret WIS (II) 30 Oct. 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[68] Secret telegram from the External Affairs Department, GOI to the Secretary of State for India, GOBr., 20 April 1942, L/WS/1/1533, OIOC.

[69] *AITM*, No. 18 (1942), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC.

Invaluable time was gained through General Alexander's fighting retirement from Burma, in which Indian Army units played a major part. This held up the Japanese until the breaking of the monsoon, rendered any operations on a large scale impossible before the autumn, by which time sufficient forces had been concentrated to ensure the defence of India.[70]

An improvement in the Allied strategic position in Eastern India in 1943, with the introduction of significant American armed forces and defence equipment in the region,[71] caused more attention to be accorded to anti-Japanese publicity. Military propaganda paid more attention to attacking the Axis powers' declared goals and pronouncements,[72] especially the Japanese plans for a 'Greater Asian Co-Prosperity Scheme'.[73] Interestingly, this translated into an increased emphasis on 'atrocity propaganda', which became increasingly sophisticated in content during this period. Apart from continuing to describe the behaviour of Japanese soldiers against the Chinese, increased care was now taken to mention the fate of the Indian victims in Southeast Asia. Consequently, descriptions of the mistreatment of policemen of Indian origin and the economic hardships faced by all 'classes' of Indians became very frequent. Radio programmes would describe the economic chaos in Malaya, Burma and the Philippines, and contrast it with the 'peace and prosperity'

[70] *Service in India*, GHQ, India, *c.*1943, p. 4.

[71] The American army was divided into three separate groups in India, each with its own headquarters and commanding general. The first, comprising land forces, was led by Lieutenant-General J. W. Stillwell; the second, the 10th U.S. Army Air Force, was commanded by Major-General L. H. Brereton, and the third, consisting of the service and supply departments, was under the charge of Major-General R. A. Wheeler. Most secret note on the 'Order of Battle: U.S. Forces in India', enclosure to most secret letter from R. C. McCay, India Office, London to H. W. Dinwiddie, War Office, GOBr., 8 July 1942, L/WS/1/1292, OIOC. American army stations were set up in Agra (UP), Allahabad (UP), Asansol (Bengal), Calcutta (Bengal), Dibrugarh (Assam), Dinajpur (Bengal), Fyzabad (UP), Gaya (Bihar), Guskhara (Bengal), Jhansi (UP), Lucknow (UP), Mohanbari (Assam), Nimita (Bengal), Ramgarh (Bihar) and Tezpore (Assam). Secret station list of US Army forces in India, 1 July 1942, L/WS/1/1292, OIOC.

[72] Most secret WIS (II) 23 July 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[73] A good description of the Japanese theme of 'co-prosperity' went thus: 'India has now [1942] become an essential part of the Asia Co-Prosperity Scheme. With Indian co-operation Asia will not only be self-sufficient but so rich in raw materials and so economically powerful that it can to a large extent dictate the terms of trade to the rest of the world. These advantages will be shared by the Japanese with their Indian brothers.' See note entitled 'Secret Appreciation of Indian Morale' by the Overseas Planning Committee, Ministry of Information, GOBr., *c.*1942, INF 1/556, PRO.

of Indian villages.[74] Though references to the rape of women had been made in the past, great emphasis was now given to instances where Indian women were involved.

But perhaps the issue to be given the greatest prominence during 1943–44 was the Japanese army's alleged disrespect for three major South Asian religions: Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. This was described by references to cases where Hindus and Muslims had been pressured into eating beef and pork respectively;[75] where Indians, irrespective of religious differences, had been forced to attend *gurdwaras* on Sundays and mosques on Fridays; where Hindus and Muslims were coerced into eating from the same dishes in mosques; where Indian women had been raped inside places of worship;[76] where Hindu prisoners of war were compelled to slaughter cows and then cut up the meat for Japanese consumption, and where Sikh prisoners of war had been made to shave off their beards and cut their hair.[77]

The gradual improvement in the strategic position from mid-1943 also caused British military propaganda to adopt a more confident tone about other issues. Emphasis now began to be given to the successes of Allied armies over the Axis forces in Europe and Africa, and these were represented as being proof of what was soon to follow in the Far East.[78] Descriptions of the strength of Allied, and British, forces were also consistently publicized in the newspaper started by the South East Asia Command—entitled the *S.E.A.C.*—and the two pamphlet series started by the India Command, entitled *Current Affairs* and *Winning The Peace*, in 1944.[79] For instance, articles in the *S.E.A.C.* described the preparedness of the army under General Slim's command, the armour available to British forces, the newly-acquired aircraft in the Allied air-forces, and British troops making 'local friends' in Japanese-held territory.[80] This propaganda was also backed up by visual representations of Allied prowess, and films and

[74] A series called *Malaya Today* was distributed among troops, and contained descriptions of the difficult conditions under Japanese rule. Most secret WIS (II) 19 May 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[75] Most secret WIS (II) 14 May 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[76] Most secret WIS (II) 19 May 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[77] Most secret WIS (II) 21 May 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[78] See, for instance, secret WIS (II) 9 June 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[79] Note on 'Wartime Education For Indian Troops', *AITM*, No. 28 (1945), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC.

[80] Note about SEAC paper in the ASSAM–Burma front, 4 April 1944, L/I/1/1050, OIOC.

photographs shown to service personnel portrayed 'Indian troops during realistic exercises'; the attack on an enemy tank and the surrender of its crew; troops wading through water and then attacking a hill; and the Madras Sappers practising for the 'great Burma push'; troops training for jungle warfare; attacks by Gurkhas on a village occupied by the Japanese; and General Wavell watching artillery corps in Assam practising with live ammunition.[81]

To magnify the effect of propaganda highlighting the Allies' strength, material enumerating the 'hardships faced by Japanese soldiers',[82] and their low morale,[83] began to be widely distributed. Bulletins would discuss the 'myth' of the 'Japanese superman' and insist that it had been 'amply proved' that it was possible to 'outthink, outshoot and outfight' the Japanese.[84] From mid-1943 such publicity began to be accompanied by 'confessions' made by Japanese soldiers, either during captivity or in diaries left behind on the battle-field. Such propaganda was disseminated through a series of pamphlets titled *Extracts From Japanese Diaries*, and dealt with the difficulties faced by Japanese troops and their recognition of the relative comfort of Allied troops. One issue reproduced a 'letter from a Sergeant to a Corporal', which declared that:

> Morning, noon and night we get one mess tin of sloppy rice—work every night—the whole night through. As you know Tai (commander) is perpetually fault finding. He treats the men entirely as if they were machines—not a minute or even a second's relaxation. The troops are completely cowed.[85]

Another edition of the series described the contents of 'The Diary of an Unknown Jap Soldier'. In it a Japanese soldier complained that he had:

> Found a package of enemy rations in the afternoon. It tasted very good. The enemy certainly eat well. I wish I could have a stomach full of such good food. . . . Received some rice from 5th Coy. [company] but no rice for tonight. No change in situation but can't fight on .0397 gals [*sic*] of rice per day. Enemy penetrated our situation.[86]

[81] Note on propaganda material by the Public Relations Directorate, India, 19 Jan. 1943, L/WS/1/1533, OIOC.
[82] Secret WIS (II), 9 June 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
[83] Three reasons were attributed for the low morale of Japanese soldiers in Burma: their 'mounting casualties', their 'inferior weapons', and their 'weakness in air strength'. Most secret WIS (II) 19 May 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
[84] Excerpts from a United States Marine Corps pamphlet reproduced in *AITM*, No. 21 (1943), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC.
[85] Appendix C to most secret WIS (II) 10 Dec. 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
[86] *Ibid*.

'Disclosures' like these dwelt at length upon the 'failing morale' of Japanese soldiers, which was re-emphasized in the texts of interviews of Japanese prisoners captured in the Arakan front.[87] Issues of the *Army in India Training Manual* used as a basis for lectures by officers, also contained sections on the topic. One edition of the publication contained 'Some Observations by Individual Jap Soldiers', which described the Japanese admiration for the Allied armies, their 'power, rapidly growing strength and firepower', and outlined the Japanese soldiers' acceptance of the 'material inferiority' of their own army.[88] Similarly, 'admissions' made allegedly in Japanese magazines, journals and radio programmes about the inferiority of their air-force and the difficulties faced in the production of aircraft were frequently mentioned.[89] British military propaganda would also often ridicule the views of Japanese military commanders who were purported to have extolled the 'nutritive value of grass for human consumption', while bemoaning the acute food shortage within their armies and the territories held by them.[90]

British military propaganda also concentrated on contradicting, and belittling, the claims of two other opponents: the Indian National Congress and the Indian National Army. The increasingly aggressive stance taken by the former organization, which culminated in the launching of the 'Quit India' movement in August 1942, forced the authorities to embark on a well-defined propaganda campaign against the party. This involved consistent attempts to underline the Congress's political antagonism towards a valid cause, its 'pro-Japanese leanings', its hostility to the interests of Indian soldiers, and its lack of sympathy for the demands made by the various 'minorities'.[91] The military propaganda calculated to attack Subhas Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army, which despite its modest size was a major source of worry for the British authorities in the subcontinent,[92] revolved around a discussion of the point-

[87] Appendix E to most secret WIS (II) 21 April 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
[88] *AITM*, No. 22 (1943), L/MIL/17/5/2240, OIOC.
[89] Appendix C to most secret WIS (II) 5 May 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
[90] Most secret WIS (II) 14 April 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
[91] For a detailed description of the official publicity onslaught against the Indian National Congress, see S. Bhattacharya, 'An official policy that went awry: The colonial state's Second World War propaganda campaign against the Indian National Congress', *International Institute of Asian Studies Newsletter*, No. 13, 1997.
[92] Only 8,000 Indian National Army soldiers—as opposed to 230,000 Japanese troops—were sent to the battle-front, and most of these saw relatively little action. See P. Heehs, 'India's Divided Loyalties?', *History Today*, July 1995, p. 22. However, even a cursory glance at historically contemporary British military documents

lessness of joining the Imperial army; the opportunism of Subhas Chandra Bose, and the forced enlistment of prisoners of war into his new force.[93] In addition, efforts were consistently made to denounce the Indian National Army as a 'puppet army', a 'mere propaganda tool' for the Axis powers, a collection of 'stretcher bearers', and a 'group of few homeless people' who lived off crumbs offered by the Japanese.[94]

From 1943 onwards the issue of the demobilization of the wartime Indian army also began to be given great prominence, primarily because intelligence reports from the battalions seemed to suggest that all Indian soldiers were becoming apprehensive about their occupational prospects after the conflict and wanted information on the issue.[95] A pamphlet series titled *Release and Resettlement* was inaugurated, and a hundred thousand copies of the first edition were distributed throughout India Command formations.[96] While publications such as these advertised the inevitability of the demobilization of the wartime army, they also described the enormous potential of employing newly released soldiers in the industries and co-operatives being planned by the colonial administration. For instance, the plans enunciated by the 'Policy Committee on [the] Re-settlement and Re-employment of troops', which was set up in the last quarter of 1943 with Firoz Khan Noon at its head, were given great prominence; as were some of the re-employment strategies. This included references to the creation of 'large scale transportation companies' which would help in providing employment to the vast mass of lorry drivers in the Indian army; the initiation of vocational training

reveals how great a danger the 'rebel' force was seen to be by the colonial authorities in India. Indeed, the British relief about their Indian regiments' continued loyalty in operations against the Indian National Army units in Burma between 1944 and 1945 was widespread. See, for instance, Weekly Intelligence Surveys in L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[93] See, for instance, appendix B to WIS (II) 23 July 1943; appendix B to WIS (II) 30 July 1943; appendix A to WIS (II) 6 Aug. 1943; appendix A to WIS (II) 13 Aug. 1943, and appendix A to WIS (II) 20 Aug. 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[94] Most secret WIS (II) 11 Feb. 1944; appendix C to most secret WIS (II) 31 March 1944; secret WIS (II) 7 April 1944; most secret WIS (II) 14 April 1944; most secret WIS (II) 21 April 1944; appendix C to secret WIS (II) 12 May 1944; appendix C to most secret WIS (II) 19 May 1944; secret WIS (II) 2 June 1944; secret WIS (II) 30 June 1944; secret WIS (II) 13 Oct. 1944, and appendix A to secret WIS (II) 24 Nov. 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[95] See, for instance, secret WIS (II) 6 Oct. 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[96] A second, revised, edition of the inaugural issue was also brought out. See letter from N. Beresford-Pierse, Welfare General in India, GHQ, New Delhi, to M. Mayne, India Office, London, 7 Nov. 1945, L/WS/2/87, OIOC.

courses for troops within various battalions to prepare them for new jobs after the war; the building of new canal systems within the Punjab allowing the government to settle many troops in the newly irrigated lands, and the establishment of 'co-operative savings banks' to assist ex-servicemen.[97] The White Paper prepared by the Government of India in October 1944 made similar promises, and its text was also widely publicized in all forms of military propaganda.[98] Films dealing with 'rural uplift, cottage industries and health' in the most important recruiting areas were screened; as were documentaries about post-war 'development'.[99] Even though some senior officers complained that 'post-war reconstruction' was being 'over-stressed' and argued that 'more might be done towards making him [the Indian soldier] appreciate that the war must be won first, and that in the Japanese he is faced with an enemy really dangerous to his own interests and not only to those of the British connection',[100] military propaganda persisted in discussing the issue in great detail right until the cessation of hostilities.[101]

## IV. Concluding Comments

This article has attempted to tell the as yet unrecorded story about the British use of intelligence—supplied by South Asians themselves via the postal censorship apparatus—to rectify or pre-empt problems which might have affected imperial rule during the critical junction of two struggles: that of self-rule and the Second World War. In describing these wartime initiatives to enhance official command and control over both the military and civil sectors of South Asian society, this piece has problematized the popular view of intelligence dominated by descriptions of cloak-and-dagger secret service operations,

[97] Telegram from Bureau of Public Information to Information Department, India Office, 3 March 1944, L/WS/1/1335, OIOC.

[98] Secret WIS (II) 27 Oct. 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[99] Military publications and films would advertise the inauguration of special educational facilities, like the Indian Troops Training School, established in Nowgong in November 1945, that had been arranged. See letter from N. Beresford-Pierse, Welfare General in India, GHQ, New Delhi, to M. Mayne, India Office, London, 7 Nov. 1945, L/WS/2/87, OIOC.

[100] Most secret WIS (II) 12 Nov. 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[101] See, for instance, secret WIS (II) 3 Aug. 1945, L/WS/1/1506, OIOC.

which were really only a side-show of the war.[102] Indeed, the study of military intelligence of the period encompasses far more than the working of code-breaking machines like the 'Ultra' and 'Enigma', or the covert monitoring of Communist activities. The dual battle for the control of Indian 'hearts and minds' seems to have had far more to do with re-directing and managing existing information than anything Bletchley Park's number crunchers could produce.

This study also allows us to question some of the generalizations made about what has come to be categorized these days as 'colonial knowledge'. The insights gained here suggest that it should not be seen as merely being either an essentially European imposition or a jointly authored project of British officials and their chosen, and interested, Indian informants. Instead, in the context of the 1940s, and one suspects in earlier decades as well, it was very often premised on information gathered about the target population from a myriad of networks, some more successful and reliable than others.[103] The monitoring of private correspondence proved to be a rich source of intelligence, on the basis of which official publicity material was created and deployed. Thus, quite apart from being inert objects of an imposed 'colonial knowledge', the targeted Indian communities would very often contribute significantly, albeit unknowingly, to the preparation of public relations initiatives meant for their consumption.

These insights are significant at yet another level. The existing historiography on South Asia has tended to ignore the fact that colonial intelligence networks and practices became increasingly sophisticated as the twentieth century wore on. Indeed, this examination of

[102] See C. Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London, 1985); A. Stripp, *Code Breaker In The Far East* (Oxford, 1995), and Carlo D'Este, 'The Army and the Challenge of War 1939–1945' in Chandler and Beckett (eds), *Oxford History of the British Military*, pp. 272–97.

[103] For a detailed description of the networks used by the colonial authorities to disseminate and gather information see S. Bhattacharya, 'A Necessary Weapon of War: State Policies towards Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939–45' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1996). Files dealing with official publicity efforts in the first half of the 1930s suggest that a variety of strategies were deployed to spread the government's view and also to gather information about the reactions to it. This would involve practices as diverse as using the village headman's or *patwari's* [record-keeper] office, *kathas* [Hindu religious meetings] and *bhajan mandalis*, 'agricultural shows and exhibitions', and officially subsidized *sanyasis* [travelling mendicants]. See, Confidential Report on Propaganda and Publicity (Jan. 1932 to March 1933), L/I/1/424, OIOC.

British military attitudes towards South Asian troops during the Second World War would encourage us to query some of the generalizations put forth by Christopher Bayly about the working of imperial information and surveillance systems in India during the late eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[104] The pivotal role accorded by him to the ubiquitous 'native informant' looks much less impressive in the context of the 1940s, when the British attempted to harvest intelligence about their Indian subjects through the deployment of alternate structures. These additional networks were often targeted at particular sections of society—in this case the South Asian soldier—and allowed the colonial authorities to gauge the 'public mood' from a perspective minus the indigenous 'informant'. The problem, where it existed, was not that reliable information was difficult to collect from the examination of private correspondence, but that it was difficult to collate and analyse due to a chronic shortage of manpower in the ranks of the civil service.[105]

The effectiveness of the wartime information policies deployed by the colonial military authorities can be gauged from their continued retention in a period of extreme strategic difficulty during which official publicity strategies were being consistently revamped.[106] The system put into place allowed them to counter the adverse effects of nationalist or Axis opposition; to generally keep up morale, and sometimes even to identify, watch and, when necessary, dismiss the unconverted.[107] Indeed, an examination of contemporary War Staff files suggest that the success of the scheme of information management encouraged the India and South East Asia Commands to expand the deployment of similar initiatives amongst their British and African units. While the so-called 'Padre's Hour', in the course of which British soldiers were encouraged to air their views, were continued till 1945, these official efforts at gathering information

[104] C. A. Bayly, 'Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 1, 1993, pp. 18–42. Bayly repeats his arguments, albeit about a smaller time-frame, in his recent book. C. A. Bayly, *Empire & Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996).

[105] See S. Bhattacharya, 'Wartime policies of State Censorship and the Civilian Population: Eastern India, 1939–45', *South Asia Research*.

[106] The 'information rooms' were considered a great success by the commanders of the units serving in India. See, for instance, most secret WIS (II) 9 April 1943 and 29 Oct. 1943, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. For an example of the analysis of the success of particular themes of propaganda, see note entitled 'Reactions in Indian units to Japanese propaganda' in most secret WIS (II) 31 March 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[107] See, for instance, most secret WIS (II) 9 Oct. 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

were buttressed by the preparation of regular 'morale reports' on the basis of military censorship.[108]

However, the military's information policies also had certain unintended effects. For instance, the reiteration between 1940 and 1945 of the inevitability of British withdrawal from India after the cessation of hostilities, especially in anti-Congress propaganda,[109] contributed to cases where South Asian soldiers feared that they would ultimately be left 'at the mercy' of a government dominated by the Indian National Congress.[110] Reports from the battalions declared that these apprehensions were exacerbated by the persistent economic difficulties, and indicated that this had caused a majority of the sepoys to fear for their future in the post-war political scenario.[111]

But the Indian soldiers' fears, and the intelligence structure that allowed the authorities to clock them, also left a negative imprint on British attitudes. Doubts about the sepoy's reliability in an increasingly politicized environment, which had emerged in rare, yet significant, bursts before December 1941,[112] became much more pronounced from 1942 onwards. A communication sent by the GHQ (India) to all commanders of Indian units after the outbreak of the 'Quit-India' movement is revealing. It asked the officers to avoid

[108] Secret reports on the morale of British, Indian and Colonial troops of Allied land forces for the months of August, September, October, November and December 1944, and January 1945, L/WS/2/71, OIOC.

[109] See, for instance, the note entitled 'Teh [*sic*] Indian Constitutional Issue', appendix B to WIS (II) 15 Dec. 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC and extract from most secret letter from GHQ (India) to the Military Secretary, India Office, GOBr., 20 Dec. 1942, L/WS/1/1337, OIOC.

[110] Most secret Army in India Morale Report for August–September 1943, L/WS/2/72, OIOC. Reports frequently mentioned the 'considerable anxiety' among Indian troops about post-war employment and the Government of India's demobilization policy. Secret report on the morale of British, Indian, and Colonial troops of Allied land forces, August–October 1944, no date, L/WS/2/71, OIOC. Also see, secret WIS (II) 6 Oct. 1944, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.

[111] Secret WIS (II) 22 June 1945, L/WS/1/1506, OIOC. Also see secret reports on the morale of British, Indian and Colonial troops of Allied land forces for months of August, September, October, November and December 1944, and January 1945, L/WS/2/71, OIOC.

[112] One report, prepared in 1941 and dealing with the impact of the historically contemporary Sikh attitudes on the Indian army, declared, for instance, that the 'atmosphere of general unrest, uncertainty and divided leadership [in the Sikh community] has had its inevitable effect on Sikhs serving in the Army. . . . It must inevitably take time to re-establish a more wholesome atmosphere. In the meantime, the Army cannot but regard the Sikh element in the Army with a degree of suspicion . . .'. Report entitled 'A survey of the Sikh situation as it affects the army', *c.*1941, HPF (I) 232/1940, NAI.

any 'suggestion of scorn for the "unenlightened Indian" who wants independence ... since freedom and independence are probably sought after by the troops themselves'.[113] Indeed, the element of probability in such forecasts became marginal as the Second World War wore on, and the seeds of doubt which had been sown in British military minds began to take on a life of their own at a time when the 'internal security position' was expected to deteriorate rapidly after the conclusion of the war in the face of increased nationalist activism.[114] A representative example of official apprehensions about the impact of the wartime political scenario on the Indian soldiers' attitudes is an extract from a report prepared in May 1943, which asserted that:

> Proposals of changes in the political constitution of India and consequent uncertainty regarding the position of the Indian Army under any new constitution has raised, even in the minds of pre-war soldiers [as opposed to the new classes inducted into the Indian army], doubts whether the British Raj is worth saving for anything but what it pays in cash and kind. The future of the soldier's own community, and the safety of his home and family in a country which may ... be controlled by men of a community he regards as hostile, are matters which ... cause him more concern than the defeat of the Axis powers. His doubts are not diminished if his [army] include[s] Indians who look forward ... to the day when India will be independent of the British Raj.[115]

A review of documentation relating to the Indian army between 1944 and August 1945, and significantly, the period leading up to South Asian independence and partition, reveals pronounced British doubts about the wisdom of depending on Indian troops in a period of extreme political flux. A good example of this is the tone of a secret plan prepared by the GHQ (India) soon after the end of the war. Titled 'Operation Asylum', it dealt with how the Government

[113] Most secret note entitled 'The Future of the Internal Security Situation in India' by Brigadier W. J. Cawthorn, DMI, GHQ, 31 Aug. 1942, L/WS/1/1337, OIOC.

[114] See, for instance, most secret WIS (II) 9 Oct. 1942, L/WS/1/1433, OIOC. Referring to the possibility of civil disorder after the war, one review warned, for instance, that '... it is fair to say that as the war draws to its close ... the general I.S. [internal security] position is bound to deteriorate, as interested parties begin to prepare (as they are now preparing) for the eventual struggle for power. In addition, the severe inflationary process that is going on in the country today is bound to cause serious trouble'. Extract from most secret letter from GHQ (India) to the Military Secretary, India Office, GOBr., 20 Dec. 1942, L/WS/1/1337, OIOC.

[115] Secret report entitled 'Subversive attempts on the loyalty of the Indian Army' by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Indian Army, 10 May 1943, L/WS/1/707, OIOC.

of India would use the Indian army to tackle a 'widespread organised armed rebellion' in the country. Notably, the opening paragraph of the section that described the aims of the project began with the warning that the success of 'all plans' could only be premised on the loyalty of the Indian forces during the disturbances.[116] This statement, as well as the military authorities' reactions towards the partition deliberations, betrayed their wariness of South Asian army personnel, especially the officer ranks.[117]

The results of these apprehensions were plain to see. As early as June 1946, the Government of India, despite having the services of the bulk of its South Asian troops, began making plans, ultimately unfulfilled, to bring in five British army divisions into the subcontinent in order to prepare for a challenge from a possible Congress-sponsored political movement.[118] Stafford Cripps reiterated the same sentiment a year later. In a Commons debate, he made it clear that the only way to hold on to India would be to go in for 'total repression', which could only be achieved by the injection of large numbers of British troops and that this, keeping in mind the situation then prevalent in the United Kingdom, was impossible.[119] There can be little doubt that such plans and statements in Parliament, and the secret deliberations that had shaped them, contributed to the rather lugubrious predictions made by successive Viceroys—Wavell and Mountbatten—about the future of the imperial edifice in India.

But, while these attitudes within the Governments of Britain and India have been noted by historians as diverse as V. P. Menon and Sumit Sarkar, these scholars have failed to appreciate the fact that the official fears were premised largely on an unwillingness to hold on to the Raj with South Asian soldiers. While they have correctly pointed out that the pressures emanating from the apparent unworkability of the interim Congress–Muslim League government, the threats to law and order from the horrific communal pogroms and the dynamic agrarian mass movements that mushroomed in the post-war period, and the palpable American unease about the retention of imperial control over India as being contributory factors to

[116] Most Secret Defence H.Q. Outline Plan: Operation Asylum, 9 December 1945, L/WS/2/65, OIOC.

[117] See, for instance, note by T.W. Rees, Commanding Officer, 4th Division, India, 30 June 1947, attached to secret minute dated 9 July 1947, WO 216/668, PRO.

[118] S. Sarkar, *Modern India* (Delhi, 1983), p. 435.

[119] V. P. Menon, *Transfer of Power in India* (Bombay, 1950), p. 346.

the British decision to quit the subcontinent, they have ignored the fact that this resolve was hastened by a belief in the unreliability of the Indian sepoy, as well as the impossibility of replacing him with British troops.[120] Although dramatic events like the mutiny by Royal Indian Navy cadets did cause a heightening of British doubts about the loyalty of its Indian armed forces, what promoted their unease much more significantly was a scarcely advertised intelligence system which had kept the military informed about the attitudes of its South Asian personnel. Wartime documents suggest that a similar surveillance network also made the GHQ (India) aware of the British troops' unwillingness to stay on in the subcontinent after the cessation of hostilities.[121] It could, therefore, perhaps be justifiably argued that the British colonial state's information policies played an important, and independent, role in hastening the dissolution of the Raj in August 1947.

[120] Indeed, it was government policy to vigorously reduce British army commitments world-wide between 1946 and 1949. See A. Farrar-Hockley, 'The Post-War Army 1945–1963', Chandler and Beckett (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Military*, pp. 317–19.

[121] See, for instance, secret reports on the morale of British, Indian and Colonial troops of Allied land forces for the months of August, September, October, November and December 1944, and January 1945, L/WS/2/71, OIOC.