



TERRITORIAL ARMY ACT, 1948: HERITAGE, CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE AND ITS ROLE IN OPERATION SINDOOR

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INTRODUCTION

In the chronicle of Indian history, the Territorial Army is woven deep into the fabric of India's defence tradition. It is part of India's longstanding defence legacy. It plays a significant role in bridging the gap between civilian life and military service. Often quoted as a citizen-soldier force, it authorises citizens to serve in the nation's military services without renouncing their civilian careers. Mandated just after a year of Indian Independence, the Territorial Army Act of 1948¹ formalised the legal foundation of this force.

As India confronts both orthodox and unconventional security threats, the territorial army's role persists in its trajectory of growth and adaptation. One of the striking instances is Operation Sindoor, where Rule 33² of the Territorial Army Rules 1948 was invoked, in which the central government empowered the Chief of Army Staff to call out 14 infantry battalions of the Territorial Army for deployment across the northern, western, and eastern commands for enhancing military readiness across the nation. This article dives deep into the legal spectrum of the Territorial Army Act, unpacks Rule 33 of the Territorial Army Rules and delves into its real-world application in this pivotal operation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The roots of the Territorial Army can be traced back to the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 (also known as The First War of Independence) when the British first raised a volunteer army to assist them with internal security. Subsequently, the British formally inculcated this in the legislation as the Indian Defence Force (1917) and later the Indian Territorial Force (1920).

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¹ Territorial Army Act 1948

² Territorial Army Rules 1948

It consisted of two wings:

1. **The Auxiliary Force** - for Europeans and Anglo-Indians
2. **The Indian Territorial Force** - for Indian volunteers

India, in its postcolonial period, required a comparable reserve mechanism under its legal system. Thus, the Indian Territorial Army Act was passed in 1948, giving statutory recognition to the modern TA Act. It was formally inaugurated by the first.

Indian Governor General, Shri C.Rajagopalachari, on 9th October 1949. This day is celebrated as the Territorial Army Day every year.

The Territorial Army is also identified as the second line of defence after the regular army. The primary objective of the Territorial Army is to serve the nation during times of crisis, such as disaster management, war, etc. Territorial Army personnel are civilians who are typically employed in civilian professions and undergo training each year for a limited period. For example, evacuation and relief during cyclones and flood relief operations in Bihar, Assam and Kerala in various years and assistance in the Indo-China war in 1967. The Territorial Army has been deployed several times throughout conflicts and operations, including:

Wartime Contributions -

1965 and 1971 Indo-Pakistan Wars: Where TA units were embodied to facilitate the Indian Army with logistical support, guarding key installations like bridges, oil refinery, railways, and relieving regular troops for frontline duties.

1999 Kargil War: Territorial Army's personnel, like engineers, transport and medical units, played key roles in the mobilisation and sustainment of the regular army. It also provided logistical support and assistance in the installation of key weaponry.

Counter-Insurgency Operation³ -

Operation in Jammu and Kashmir: Various TA units from the local community were raised in the conflict-prone areas in J&K. Their deep local knowledge, dialect fluency, and trust within

³ [India Activates Territorial Army Amid Rising Border Tensions](#)

the society made them suitable for this role. They assisted in finding terrorist hideouts, preventing infiltration and maintaining peace through civil outreach.

Operation in North-East: TA personnel were deployed in the north-east region during peak insurgency movements where they acted as a force multiplier, guarding sensitive installations, manning checkpoints and conducting joint patrols with the Indian Army and Paramilitary forces.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN AID

Most TA units have been at the forefront during times of disasters like earthquakes, floods, landslide relief, etc. Some of the notable missions are:

2001 Gujarat Earthquake - TA units facilitated in rescue and relief.

2013 Uttarakhand Floods - TA units played a crucial role in evacuation and reconstruction.

THE INDIAN TERRITORIAL ARMY ACT 1948: AN OVERVIEW

The Territorial Army is composed of several units formed from various sectors, showing a unique fusion of military discipline with civilian integration. The Territorial Army at its inception had various types of units such as Armed Regiment (TA), Infantry Battalion (TA), Air Defence (TA), AMC Field Ambulance (TA), etc. But by 1972, most of these units were either disbanded or converted into a regular army, except Inf Bn (TA). As of now, the Territorial Army has a strength of approximately 50,000 personnel comprising two units. The two units are as follows:

Departmental Unit: These units include personnel from the government sector or public sector undertakings. It consists of 65 units such as Indian Railways, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), etc.

Non-Departmental Unit: These units consist of privately employed citizens. Whereas the exact number of non-departmental units is not explicitly mentioned. It comprises infantry and engineering battalions. It also includes 10 ecological Territorial Army battalions, which are sponsored by the state governments and primarily focus on afforestation, ecological restoration, sustainable development and environment-specific activities.

Section 6 of the Territorial Army Act⁴ provides the legal basis for the eligibility criteria. General eligibility criteria under section 6 for the Territorial Army are as follows:

1. He/she should be a citizen of India.
1. He/she should have graduated from a recognised university.
2. He/she should be aged between 18-42 years.
3. He/she should be physically and mentally fit and should qualify for any other requirements as may be specified by the Ministry of Defence, Government of India.
4. He/she should be employed gainfully in any specific sector(e.g. PSU/ state govt./ central govt./self-employed, etc).

Rule 4 of the Territorial Army Rules⁵ also mentions things like the examination process for enrollment, and medical and background checks.

Structure and Command: Despite the Territorial Army being a part-time unit, it directly operates under the Ministry of Defence, while in times of mobilisation, it functions under the command structure of the Indian Army.

KEY PROVISIONS OF THE ACT

The following are the key provisions of the act:

Recruitment is Voluntary (Section 6 of the TA Act 1948): Any Person who satisfies the eligibility criteria stated under section 6 of the TA Act 1948 is eligible for the recruitment process voluntarily. Meanwhile, sub-section 6A⁶ of the act also introduces mandatory obligations. It states that people selected for the services can be compelled to serve in the Territorial Army as and when required, but it excludes women from this obligation. However, women can provide services under section 6 of the act voluntarily.

Rights and Allowances: Section 7B of the TA Act 1948⁷ deals with the preservation of certain rights of the individuals performing military services under the act. It ensures that those who are called for military service retain their previous financial rights. It specifically talks about their investment in the financial schemes and funds. It makes sure that the people reserve their

⁴ Territorial Army Act, 1948; section 6

⁵ Territorial Army Rules, 1948; rule 4

⁶ Territorial Army Act, 1948; section 6A

⁷ Territorial Army Act, 1948; section 7B

financial rights both during their service and after their reintegration. While Rule 23 of the TA Rules 1948,⁸ read with schedules III and IV, primarily engaged with the pay and allowances of the personnel. These rules specifically state the rate of payments and allowances for different forms of ranks and their period of service.

Disciplinary Control: Section 9 of the TA Act 1948,⁹ confronts the conduct-related and punitive actions towards the personnel. It states that territorial army personnel, despite being part-time service providers, are subject to similar rules, laws, regulations and code of conduct in the army as their co-equal members of the regular army while they are actively serving for any cause of the nation.

RULE 33 OF THE INDIAN TERRITORIAL ARMY RULES 1948 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN OPERATION SINDOOR

Rule 33¹⁰ of the Territorial Army Rules 1948 states that, every officer and every enrolled person of the Territorial Army shall, by order of the central government or by order of such other authority as may be empowered by the central government in this behalf, be liable, to be called out to act in support of the civil power or to provide essential guards or to be embodied to support or supplement the regular army. It signifies that during times of emergency, this rule gives authority to the Central Government to call out all the TA personnel and enrolled members to serve actively for the nation. It grants the central government authority to ask the Chief Army Staff to call out all the members of the TA for serving as full-time members of the army and supporting and supplementing the regular army.

ITS ROLE IN OPERATION SINDOOR

Operation Sindoor was a strategically planned retaliatory operation carried out against the Pahalgam Terror attack, which allegedly claimed the lives of 26 innocent civilians. It was a well-structured and coordinated attack by the Indian army, navy, and air force on 7th May 2025. It targeted nine terrorist infrastructure sites in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. High-precision weapons were used during the operation for the utmost accuracy and zero collateral damage.

⁸ Territorial Army Rules, 1948; rule 23

⁹ Territorial Army Act, 1948; section 9

¹⁰ Territorial Army Rules, 1948; rule 33

Rule 33 of the Territorial Army Rules of 1948 was embodied during the operation to provide a crucial support function to the Indian army as follows :

Logistical and Intel Support: The call out for the TA personnel by the Chief Army Staff was triggered by the escalation from Pakistan's cross-border strikes, to facilitate the Indian Army with sufficient logistical, transportational and communication support.

Civil-Military Coordination: Owing to efficient civil-military coordination, they were mobilisable for guard duties, guarding critical spaces, gathering intelligence reports, patrolling in red alert areas and supporting the regular army. They also assisted the regular army with mock drills while effectively maintaining peace and calm among the civilians.

Medical and casualty support: They provide the regular army with proper aid and medical assistance in times of casualties during war. Due to the assistance of the Territorial army in logistical and intel support the regular army can manage their time efficiently leading to rapid retaliation against the assailant, with effective civil-military coordination the army could deploy more workforce in the forefront to tackle the situation and by providing them with timely medical assistance they ensure their operational readiness and enhance their morale. This relieves the regular army, allowing it to concentrate on core military engagements and keeping the army's sharp edge where it's needed the most-on the Frontlines.

CONCLUSION

Operation Sindoor not only exhibited India's defence system's capabilities, indigenous weaponry and precision striking capabilities, but also highlighted the significance of Indian legislative instruments such as Rule 33 of the Territorial Army Rules of 1948, which enables the government to rapidly increase the manpower of the defence system without the delays of mobilising fresh recruits. It reflects the flexibility of India's defence framework, where legal provisions facilitate the real-world amplification of military capabilities during times of crisis. It increases civilian preparedness and active military execution. It supported the fact that we need such types of legislation in our country, as it safeguards the legal legitimacy and strategic efficacy of India's counter-terror response, ensuring that India's response to terror is both legally sound and strategically robust. This exhibits how the initial idea of blending civilian life with military readiness is still relevant today.