Dangers of Politicising the Military

What is the issue?

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- Karnataka campaign trail is witness to politicians hurling corrosive remarks against their opponents regarding treatment of military veterans.
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- It is prudent for the political class to keep the armed forces out of electoral rhetoric in order to ensure that the institution remains apolitical.
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What kicked off the electoral controversy involving defence personals?

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- PM Modi recently criticised the Congress party for insulting two illustrious generals of the Indian Army.
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- Both these military icons, Field Marshal K.M. Cariappa and General K.S. Thimayya, are from the local Coorgi community in Karnataka.
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- Notably, this case of “disrespect” goes back many decades, to the 1947-48 war (Pakistan) and the 1962 war (China).
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- The PM stated that Gen.Thimayya was insulted by the then Congress government despite having led the Indian forces to victory in 1948 Pak War.
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- The PM additionally noted that Gen.Thimayya had to resign in order to maintain the sanctity of the position that he held.
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- He also said that similar inappropriate treatment was met out to Field Marshal Cariappa after his campaign against the Chinese in 1962.
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- The electoral subtext was to show the congress in bad light in relation to national security by fuelling the perception that Nehru mocked to veterans.
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Are the allegations true?

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- Indian Army had a British chief during the 1947-48 war for Kashmir and the army wasn’t led by Gen. Thimmaya in Kashmir.
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- Gen. Thimmaya was only a 2 star general in Kashmir operations (under Lt.Gen Cariappa’s command) and he did not resign after the war as stated.
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- Similarly, the reference to Cariappa was way off the mark, for he had retired in 1953 and was in no way involved with the 1962 war.
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- Sadly, instead of countering the PM’s assertions with hard facts, the Congress dispensation came with its own bogus claims.
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- It is true that Krishna Menon had sought to politicise the Army top brass and that Nehru chided Thimmaya in parliament.
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- But its relevance in the current electoral context and glaring factual distortions made by the PM was a clear overstretch for political gains.
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What is the larger picture?

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- Electoral campaigns in the past few years is becoming increasingly polarising as even frontline leaders getting vocally irresponsible.
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- To gain electorally, even high constitutional offices (like president, ex-PMs) aren’t being spared by politicians, which is degrading our institutional culture.
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- The current episode has roped in the defence forces too into the mudslinging, which can potentially wreck havoc for the country’s security apparatus.
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- Hence, all these merit reflecting upon and frontline leaders should be better advised to keep off comments that could polarise our state institutions.
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- There have been many institutional blunders since 1948, but these are better off by being discussed in a consensus environment on campaigns.
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What is the way ahead?

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- Indian democracy has ensured sufficient checks to ensure that army remains apolitical, and it has largely been so since independence.
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- There is indeed resentment that Indian Military as an institution is being badly treated by Delhi's politico-bureaucratic dispensation for long.
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- "Non-Functional Upgrade" (NFU) scheme of the UPA government, advantaged the profile of civil servants vis-à-vis military, thereby worsening the bitterness.
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- While constructive criticism are needed to address these teething troubles, corrosive electioneering will only aggravate the issue in the long run.
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- The democratic ecosystem is best nurtured by institutions that are "fire-walled from politics" and remain neutral.
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Source: The Hindu

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