

Declassification of War Histories

On June 12, it was announced by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh that a policy approving the declassification and compilation of war operations histories recorded by the Ministry of Defence was green lit.

The responsibility for declassification of records rests with the respective organisations as specified in the Public Record Act 1993 and Public Record Rules 1997, as amended from time to time.

As per the policy, records should be declassified in 25 years. Records older than 25 years will be appraised by archival experts and transferred to the National Archives of India.

This article will further give details about the Declassification of War Histories within the context of the IAS Exam

Details about Declassification of War Histories Policy

- The History Division will coordinate with other departments when seeking approvals and publishing war/operations history. A committee composed of representatives of the Services, MEA, MHA and other organisations and prominent military historians will be established.
- The Declassification policy establishes clear timelines regarding the compilation and publication of war/operations history. It states that the Committee should be formed within two years of completion of operations, thus the collection of records should be completed in three years.
- This rests with the respective organisations as specified in the Public Record Act 1993 and the Public Record Rules 1997.
- The compiled history of wars and operations, within five years, will be for internal consumption first, and later the committee may decide to publicly release whole or parts of it, considering the sensitivity of the subject.
- However, details of the 1962 Sino-Indian War, Kargil War and operations like Operation Bluestar and other sensitive work will remain classified.

Why is Declassification of War Histories needed?

There has always been a tendency to politicise military and national security challenges. Before, previous governments were of the opinion that declassifying military secrets would compromise national security. This is even more apparent as the disputes between China and Pakistan are still

active and yet to be resolved. Hence, the governments in question will feel that openness of military secrets must be restricted for the time being.

But declassification of military histories can lead to a more objective assessment of post-Independence India's military history. This assessment can result in a better and informed decision with regard to India's military policy.

- Whatsmore, a liberalised declassification system will lead to lesser cases of politicisation of military events.
- Timely publication of war histories would give people an accurate account of the events, provide authentic material for academic research and counter the unfounded rumours.
- Declassified archival sources are the surest way to understand why defence reforms are stillborn or missing, by revealing the pressures, the constraints, the lack of leadership, foresight and risk-aversion that have stymied change.
- Declassification will enable scholarly study on higher defence organisation, defence procurement, military intelligence studies, recruitment standards and priorities of the armed services, military personnel issues, training etc.

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Declassification of War histories

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What is the challenge regarding Declassification of War History?

The significant challenge is the need to spell out clearly what kinds of products could come out of this initiative and how the structures and processes to manage this would be organised.