
India's National Security Strategy: Imperative of Integrating Defence Policy

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The perils of not having a formal national security strategy or a national defence policy came to the fore yet again as events unfolded in the week after the September 18, 2016, attack by Pakistan-based terrorists against the Indian Army's base at Uri in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Though such attacks have happened repeatedly in the past, it appeared that well formulated guidance on defence matters in general, and our military capabilities in particular, is not automatically available to our leadership to deal with even the most frequent among the wide range of security challenges that India is likely to be confronted with. Not having guidance through formal policies may provide flexibility in response, but it also increases the risk of making mistakes in our handling of security-related incidents. And, more importantly, it provides space for an adversary like Pakistan to exploit apparent gaps in our security framework in the misperception that it is unlikely to face due punishment. The point is: do our responses have to appear so 'episodic' and ad hoc? It is a strange paradox that India, an emerging power, aspiring to be a regional power, does not have a formal 'national security strategy'. Consequently, 'contingency driven ad-hocism', derived from individual inclinations of

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It is a strange paradox that India, an emerging power, aspiring to be a regional power, does not have a formal ‘national security strategy’. Consequently, ‘contingency driven ad-hocism’, derived from individual inclinations of the leadership and the bureaucracy of the day, can describe India’s response to most security crises.

the leadership and the bureaucracy of the day, can describe India’s response to most security crises. And, equally importantly, why cannot we have a national defence policy, instead of being repeatedly reminded of its absence whenever our adversaries initiate malignant actions in the security realm against us? It needs no emphasis, therefore, that if a national defence policy is formulated, it must be well integrated with our national security strategy.

National aims, interests and objectives drive the security and military policies and strategies of a country. The

Indian ‘national security strategy’, in the current context, must not only deal with threats to our strategic autonomy as well as the external military threats to the nation, it must also deal with internal threats, threats to our core values and other non-traditional threats that face the nation. It must also take into account that external and internal threats need to be countered not only by the armed forces and other elements of hard power, but also require political and diplomatic means to deal with them. Further, the national security strategy must also aim to achieve our national aspirations in the domestic, regional and global contexts, in a time-bound manner. These goals would include achievement of non-traditional aspects of security like economic and human development, which contribute to human security, as well as aspects like energy and environmental security.

In the absence of a ‘national security strategy’, the biggest gap that persists in our security system is that we do not have a formal, coherent,

and updated 'national defence policy' which is integrated with national security policies. And, thus, not surprisingly, our national security structure at the apex level does not have a formal system of appropriate military advice enmeshed into it. Possibly, 70 years have not been enough to make our system gain the maturity, wisdom and confidence to get over its awkwardness in dealing with the military, resulting in lack of understanding of the military and its related strategies, doctrines and plans. The existing system of 'case by

case military advice', rather than a well articulated national defence policy, backed by 24/7 military advice, has many flaws, and begs for change as we wait to deal with the next 'military contingency'.

It is, indeed, surprising that, India, a nuclear weapon state, faced with a number of well defined external threats, deals with defence matters and policy in a seemingly lackadaisical manner. The only saving grace is that we have not had to fight a war in any form since the full-fledged 1971 Indo-Pak War and the limited war at Kargil in 1999. In fact, it appears at this point that as a consequence, many in the leadership feel, quite illogically, that wars are unlikely to take place in the future and that India should start cutting down its military. As far as defence matters are concerned, the policy thrust appears to be more on civilian centred defence procurement, manufacturing and indigenisation, with many studies related to 'manpower cuts' among the armed forces' personnel.

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Walter Lippmann, an American political commentator during the Cold War, famously stated in 1943 in the context of national security, "A nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by war." The question that comes to the fore is, "Is the leadership even aware of the gaps in the current levels of military deterrence and preparedness, so that it can start planning to do something about it?" After all, unless we modernise our military in a time-bound manner, our deterrence may fail, and we may have to wage war in a disadvantageous position, while we attempt to restore or regain our core national security interests.

Articulation of India's 'national security strategy', and consequent 'national defence policy', must take into consideration the following: the need to preserve our strategic autonomy, territorial integrity and core values; the security related developments in the global and regional environments; the external and internal threats which impact the nation; our capabilities in relation to our threats and the capabilities of our adversaries; the need to contribute towards regional and global security; and our strategic relationships with other countries. It should be noted, however, that India's capability development agenda and goals will invariably face challenges of budget constraints, resulting in the 'guns versus butter' debate at every stage. Nonetheless, as an overarching factor, it must be kept in view that the economic, developmental and aspirational goals of the nation cannot be achieved unless there is peace, stability and security in the country.

On the subject of external threats, it is well known that, as a consequence of issues related to India's independence and partition in 1947, we have inherited territorial disputes with two of our neighbours, that not only keep themselves militarily well endowed, but are also armed with nuclear weapons. What makes the matter more complex and raises the level of threat for India is that, since the last fifty years or so, both these neighbours, namely, China and Pakistan, have a thriving nexus between them, even to the point of China fathering Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme, which

is solely targeted at India. Ignoring the Chinese military threat cost us dearly in 1962, in the form of a catastrophic defeat. And being dismissive about the threat from Pakistan in the early years of independence, led to repeated wars, followed by its 'low cost' terror-based campaign, which has continued for more than quarter of a century. And now, by ignoring the possible manifestations of a future 'two-front threat', which is still evolving, the consequences can, indeed, be disastrous, to say the least.

A 'national defence policy', in the Indian context, would majorly have to be a military sub-set of the national security strategy for dealing with external threats and challenges, taking into account the specific components of internal security which the military is mandated to deal with, namely, counter-infiltration, counter-insurgency, anti-terrorism and disaster management. Thus, to start off with, one would have to look at

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strategic guidance for the possible formulation of India's national security strategy.

National Security Strategy Guidance: For Military-Related External Threats

With regard to 'defence of India's national territory and resources from an external threat', the related national security strategy issues which must be addressed by a national defence policy, are as follows:

- Maintain credible military deterrence against potential adversaries.
- Defend our national and territorial interests on land, sea, air, space and cyber space.
- Physical guarding and/or surveillance of land, air and maritime borders, island territories, off-shore assets and trade routes, especially disputed borders, for early detection of intrusions or threats, if any.
- Maintain a tri-Service rapid response capability to respond to security challenges during war and peace.
- Ensure a fool-proof and well coordinated intelligence mechanism to provide early warning of threats, both external and internal.
- Prevent attacks in the cyber and information domains against own defence and civilian networks and capabilities.
- Build up/ strengthen a strong military technology base and related indigenous capability for manufacture of arms/ ammunition/ equipment to enhance self-reliance and prevent external pressures during crises.

National Security Strategy Guidance: For Internal Security Threats

Other aspects related to India's national security where the military is mandated to take necessary action are as follows:

- Protect national interests against internal threats like terrorism (including nuclear terrorism), insurgency and militancy with a view to negate secessionist and related destabilising efforts.

- Promote and protect the core values of democracy, secularism, freedom, unity and human rights as enshrined in our Constitution by value-based ethics and practices as well as providing aid to civil authority, when requisitioned.
- Maintain close surveillance and monitoring of the internal security situation in areas of heightened threat.
- Maintain rapid response capability against terror strikes/ hostage taking, involving multiple agencies, both police and military, including the National Security Guard (NSG) and Special Forces (SF).
- Promote peace and stability in the region through cooperative economic development backed by diplomatic initiatives for resolution of disputes and conflicts.
- Promote regional cooperation and coordination for early detection of regional/transnational cross-spectrum threats, to neutralise the same in a timely and proactive manner.
- Provide Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) support in the region, when required/requested.
- Contribute towards selective capacity-building in the military domain among neighbouring and other friendly countries.
- Neutralise anti-Indian efforts/propaganda by potential adversaries/inimical elements.
- Promote/protect diaspora interests in the region and the world.
- Establish strong and mutually beneficial relations/strategic partnerships with other countries, and regional/global security groupings, including the United Nations, through defence cooperation, anti-piracy, counter-terrorism and peacekeeping activities.
- Promote security interests at the global level, including coordination of security, intelligence and cyber issues.

Defining the External Threat from Pakistan and China

Pakistan launched its first ‘hybrid’ war (by irregular forces in concert with the military) against India just two months after its partition from India in August 1947, to try and grab parts of J&K. Having failed in that attempt, Pakistan repeated the same effort some 18 years later, in 1965, after it was emboldened by the supply of military equipment in the interim from the United States, which it received after opportunistically joining the latter’s anti-Communist alliances against the Soviet Union and China. The 1971 War that followed six years later, as a consequence of Pakistan’s genocide against its Bengali people, which resulted in a large scale exodus of refugees into India, saw Pakistan being dealt a comprehensive defeat and its eastern half being dismembered, to form Bangladesh.

Towards the end of the US-led Afghanistan campaign, in the second half of the 1980s, Pakistan commenced an insidious terror campaign in J&K by diverting trained ‘Mujahideen’ fighters, and sponsoring militancy among the Muslim population of the state. The terror campaign run by Pakistan’s intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), sponsored by the Pakistani state, and backed by nuclear coercion, has resulted in the killing of a large number of innocents in J&K and the rest of India. Emboldened by the lack of serious approbation by the international community towards these gross violations of human rights, Pakistan launched yet another unsuccessful hybrid war against the Indian state when, in 1999, it occupied some hilly areas at Kargil in the Ladakh region of J&K, to cut off the primary route of supply to the Siachen glacier. Despite being taken by surprise initially, the Indian Army responded strongly, and backed by the Indian Air Force, swiftly dealt a telling defeat to Pakistan yet again.

Pakistan’s Politico-Military Strategy Towards India

Pakistan’s politico-military strategy towards India appears to be:

- Politically, to breed and promote hatred against India domestically,

regionally and globally, and use all means available to the Pakistani state to keep alive the Kashmir issue and the 'two-nation ideology'.

- Build strategic relationships regionally and globally to gain political, economic and military support for use against India.
- Militarily, follow a sub-conventional strategy in the form of sponsoring insurgency and terror strikes in Kashmir and the rest of India (and also in Afghanistan) using non-state actors (good terrorists), sponsored and trained by the Pakistani state/Army (through the ISI).
- Concurrently, make efforts to prevent a limited/conventional military response by India to its terror attacks, by employing nuclear coercion (targeting minds in India and the international community)
- Seek (and receive) all forms of political and military support and assistance from China, including nuclear technology and material, for its anti-India strategies and efforts.
- Run ISI cells and network for anti-India activities in Indian cities and regionally.
- Make efforts to project a link between actions of homegrown insurgents and terrorists like the Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP) and Indian intelligence agencies, for domestic, regional and global consumption.

China's Politico-Military Strategy Towards India

China and India could have been enjoying a very cordial and mutually beneficial bilateral partnership if they had successfully resolved their territorial disputes. But that has not happened. Be that as it may, China currently appears to be following a politico-military strategy with clear anti-India overtones, as evident from its lack of interest in resolving the existing border disputes, its blocking of India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and UN Security Council, its coming in the way of India's efforts to get Pathankot terror mastermind Masood Azhar sanctioned by the United Nations, and its unwarranted remarks on the situation in Kashmir. Broadly, its strategy appears to be as follows:

- Prevent India from achieving leadership status in Asia by undermining India's interests politically, economically and militarily.
- Keep the territorial dispute alive and continue military preparations with a view to exploit the dispute militarily at some opportune point in the future.
- Keep India's ambitions limited to the South Asian framework by strategic counter-moves, by building relationships and military facilities in India's neighbourhood, especially by using Pakistan as an anti-India proxy.
- Evaluate sub-conventional and other asymmetric strategies, with appropriate deniability, for application against Indian interests.

The Two-Front Threat

Historically, ever since the late 1960s, from the time China and Pakistan started developing a politico-economic-military relationship with anti-India overtones, there has been a related question that, if there was a India-Pakistan War or a India-China War, whether and how the third country would intervene against India in that war. During the 1971 India-Pakistan War, China did not intervene militarily despite desperate requests by Pakistan, on the one hand, and related requests by the US government on Pakistan's behalf, on the other. Though many would ascribe the reasons for the non-intervention by China to the choice of timing of the war by India (winter) and the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971, non-intervention by China could have also been due to the fact that China wanted to be seen as a responsible country with an independent decision-making approach on the matter. Nonetheless, it has always been Pakistan's effort to draw China into its bilateral conflicts with India. Though China has been generally circumspect about this issue, the fact that it has not hesitated to provide assistance to Pakistan in its quest for nuclear weapons, at the cost of facing global approbation for being a nuclear proliferator, suggests that

China is capable of crossing other 'red lines' too. Thus, in the current circumstances, it would be prudent for India to be prepared for third country involvement, even direct military intervention, in the case of a conflict with either of its potential adversaries.

A Proposed National Security Strategy for India Must Integrate a National Defence Policy

India's national defence policy, which should ideally be drawn from its national security strategy, should form an integral part of the national security policy. The primary role of the armed forces is to defend territorial integrity, preserve core values enshrined in the Constitution and protect the strategic autonomy of the country by deterrence or waging war. The secondary roles include providing assistance for maintenance of internal security and restoring law and order, providing troops and resources for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and participation in United Nations peacekeeping, foreign defence cooperation activities and Out of Area Contingencies (OOAC) when so directed by the government. Hence, in keeping with the relevant (defence-related) parts of the suggested national security strategy, the national defence policy must incorporate the issues discussed below.

India's National Defence Policy

Primary Roles

Deterrence Against External Threats: Preventing war by maintaining credible military deterrence against potential adversaries is the primary role of the armed forces of a nation. This is achieved by ensuring a strong and modern military capability in the nuclear, conventional, counter-sub-conventional, cyber and space realms, backed by appropriate military and nuclear doctrines, combined with optimum preparedness to take to war at appropriate notice. The desired capabilities would take

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note of the existing and future military capabilities of potential adversaries, their doctrines and the likelihood and nature of conflicts. Actual preparedness would factor in prioritisation, based on budget allotment and related constraints.

Capability to Undertake Military Operations Successfully: In case so directed by the government, the armed forces must defend our national and territorial interests on land, sea, air, space and cyber space by waging war. In this regard, the armed forces should be always well trained and prepared to respond proactively, when directed, to any

threat from our potential adversaries. War, if undertaken, must be prosecuted swiftly and terminated on terms favourable to our country and armed forces. This would entail defending our territorial integrity, capture of territory, and destruction of the war-waging potential of the adversary, as also capture of prisoners of war, for post-war negotiations from a position of advantage.

Guarding of Disputed Borders During Peace-Time: Physical guarding and/or surveillance, including technological surveillance of disputed land, air and maritime borders like the Line of Control (LoC), Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) and Line of Actual Control (LAC), to detect intrusions, if any, at the earliest and take action to restore the status-quo ante. In case of war, the defence of other (undisputed) borders, if attacked or threatened, would automatically devolve on the armed forces.

Maintenance of Tri-Service Rapid Response Capability: India, as an emerging power, must maintain a tri-Service rapid response capability to respond to security challenges in the operational, internal security

and regional domains during peace and war, with capabilities to respond speedily to threats to our offshore island territories and other economic interests. Though it essentially entails better tri-Service preparedness for air and sea transported operations by Army/Special Forces' units and formations, it would also provide capability for Out of Area Contingencies (OOAC) and HADR in a peace-time scenario, when called upon to do so.

Effective Intelligence Mechanism: There has been a number of cases of serious intelligence failures, the most prominent being the fiasco in Kargil in 1999. A fool-proof and well coordinated military intelligence mechanism needs to be ensured, incorporating inputs of all the intelligence agencies and resources, to provide early warning of threats, both external and internal.

Cyber Security: Cyber threats are growing exponentially, both in terms of the numbers and sophistication of attacks. There is a need to maintain a dynamic, proactive cyber security capability to prevent cyber attacks against own defence as well as civilian networks and capabilities, while cooperating with external agencies on the wider issues of cyber defence.

Self-Reliance in Defence: As long as we are dependent primarily on imports for our weapons, equipment and ammunition, we are vulnerable to being held hostage during times of war in terms of availability of items and spares, as also the cost of these items. Thus, it is of prime importance to our defence capability that we build up/strengthen indigenous capability for manufacture of arms/ammunition/equipment to enhance self-reliance and prevent related external pressures during crises.

Protection of Defence Establishments: In recent years, terrorist modules from across the border have attacked our defence establishments on a number of occasions, causing casualties, mostly among security personnel and innocent civilians. The primary responsibility for protection of defence establishments and a 'first tier' counter-terror response is

of the unit/ establishment itself and the individual Service concerned. Specially trained Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) and Defence Security Corps (DSC) units form the backbone of such response. The local Army formation, if available, is responsible for the second tier response. Special Forces units are called upon as third/fourth tier responders. Military units are required to prepare adequately, in terms of training, equipping and periodic reconnaissance, to respond speedily and effectively against terror strikes.

Armed Forces at the Forefront of Harnessing Technology: The armed forces have the strategic need and the structural capacity to drive technology missions in a number of niche areas. Hence, there is a need to incentivise all the wings within the armed forces to remain at the forefront in harnessing technology with a view to achieve strategic advantage vis-à-vis our adversaries as well as optimisation in military capability. Service design bureaus and technology boards must be strengthened so that they can work in concert with our research and manufacturing agencies.

Secondary Roles

Internal Security: The armed forces, especially the Army, are required to play a substantial role in internal security matters, i.e. to protect national interests against internal threats like terrorism (including nuclear terrorism), insurgency, and militancy in various parts of the country, with a view to negate secessionist and related destabilising efforts. Such threats could be externally sponsored or homegrown, or a combination of both. Raising of Rashtriya Rifles units has provided specialist capabilities in this field to the Army. Consequently, the Army has been able to stabilise the situation quite effectively in the hinterland areas of J&K. Army formations and units are also playing an important role in ensuring stability in the northeastern states affected by insurgency. However, once the situation is stabilised, efforts to resolve the problem politically must be given the requisite attention by the government so

that the Army is relieved of its internal security duties and can return to training commitments related to its primary role.

Preserve Core Values: The armed forces play a crucial role in the promotion and protection of the core values of democracy, secularism, freedom, unity and human rights as enshrined in our Constitution by their value-based ethics and practices. They also assist in countering threats to these core values by providing aid to civil authority in times of need.

Restoration of Law and Order When Requisitioned For the Purpose: The armed forces are mandated to provide 'aid to civil authority' in case of breakdown of law and order or in case of a heightened threat. In such cases, if the local police, central armed police and paramilitary are not available or found to be incapable of regaining control of the situation, the Army may be requisitioned to restore public order. To that extent, military units need to maintain close surveillance and monitoring of the internal security situation in areas of heightened threat, so that they are able to intervene speedily and effectively. In the case of terror attacks in civilian areas, the Army, if available, can be requisitioned by the local civil authority for a counter-terror response.

Defence Cooperation with Friendly Foreign Countries: Military diplomacy and defence cooperation have been found to be effective tools for developing good relations with other countries. Training of military personnel, conduct of combined exercises, gifting of weapons and equipment, provision of logistic support, visits by senior officers, etc are tools available to the military to promote or strengthen bonds with other countries as also for capacity building among friendly countries. The Indian military has proved very adept in this role and must be increasingly employed in defence cooperation activities and conduct of defence dialogues to build strategic partnerships with select countries, in pursuit of our national interests.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief: Though the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is the primary

authority mandated for HADR in the country, the Indian armed forces invariably end up being the first responders, due to their geographical spread in the country and their expertise in the field. Provision of HADR support within the country and in the wider regional context, when required/ requested, has enabled India to project its military prowess in a benevolent and humane manner. It has also enabled building bridges with the affected population in militancy affected areas, as happened during the floods in J&K in 2014.

United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Right from the initial stages, the Indian military has been at the forefront of United Nations peacekeeping activities. Indian peacekeepers enjoy a good reputation and are sought by the United Nations not only for their exemplary neutrality and high levels of professionalism but also for their high behavioural standards and people friendly approach towards the local population in the strife-torn areas of their deployment. The Indian Army has made major contributions towards capacity building in the field of UN peacekeeping by training military peacekeepers from other countries and providing instructors, when required. India must continue to participate in UN peacekeeping and remain a beacon for high professional and behavioural standards. All the agencies concerned must ensure proper administrative and equipment back-up so that the peacekeepers are able to carry out their duties in an optimal manner without having to keep looking over their shoulder all the time.

Role in Anti-Piracy Operations: The Indian Navy made a stellar contribution towards eradicating the threat of piracy along the global sea lanes of communication and trade routes by joining the regional and international collaborative effort in this regard. The Indian Navy will have to continue to participate in collective efforts, under the aegis of the United Nations, to secure the global commons, whenever required to do so.

Evacuation of Beleaguered Diaspora: The Indian Air Force and Indian Navy have increasingly been playing a crucial role in evacuating

our diaspora, who suddenly come under threat due to deteriorating security conditions, e.g. in Libya and Yemen in recent years. Safe and timely evacuation becomes a dire necessity, keeping in view the expanding numbers of Indians seeking employment all over the world, even in the strife-torn areas of West Asia and Africa. The Indian military will have to be prepared for such interventions/evacuations at short notice.

Global Counter-Terror Response:

Keeping in view the possible terror threats to the global commons, including the threat of nuclear terrorism, it is increasingly possible that the UN will have to play a more decisive role in dealing with the evolving threats in this domain. Given its rising profile in the global security arena, India will have to be prepared for requests for active participation in such collective efforts. The Indian military, with its vast experience in counter-terror operations, is ideally suited to play a participatory role in such efforts, in case the government perceives such participation to be in India's national interests.

Conclusion

It is high time that the Indian defence establishment gets down to articulating a national defence policy. Considering that such a policy must flow from a national security strategy, it is also important that a written national strategy must be formulated at the earliest. It needs no emphasis that, in the absence of a formal national defence policy, our response to threats or other sudden developments in the military arena will be largely ad-hoc in nature, as has occurred in various instances in the past. Formulation of a national defence

It is high time that the Indian defence establishment gets down to articulating a national defence policy. Considering that such a policy must flow from a national security strategy, it is also important that a written national strategy must be formulated at the earliest.

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policy, integrated with the national security strategy, would facilitate focussed capability building and articulation of appropriate military doctrines to meet the threats and challenges of the future. It would enable better training and preparedness so that our defence forces are able to operate and deliver optimally in the future.

From the national defence policy would flow a recommended military strategy for India, which should broadly include the following:

- Maintaining a strong, modern, cross-spectrum, technology-based military capability, backed by suitable conventional and nuclear doctrines, as deterrence against our potential adversaries.
- In case India's military deterrent proves ineffective to prevent a large scale terror attack, India must seek to exploit a perceived conventional window, within the nuclear backdrop, to launch a punitive conventional response of appropriate scale and intensity.
- In response to a nuclear attack, in any form, India must respond with 'massive retaliation' by undertaking multiple nuclear attacks, in keeping with the tenets of our nuclear policy.
- India must prevent/counter strategic encirclement by China by undertaking counter-moves sub-regionally and regionally, while continuing with preparations to thwart a military attack, if initiated at any stage.
- In case of war with either adversary, the other adversary would need to be incentivised/deterred to not interfere in any manner.