



CLAWS

The Emerging Strategic Community and Culture in India

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Introduction

During the Cold War, India's participation in global strategic issues was restricted not because it was unable to think or influence, but because of a lack of strategic capability. Indian intellectuals and academicians were more than aware of the international security issues and perspectives and the military professionals were more than endowed to think about the utility of conventional forces in a nuclear world having the enormous destructive powers of the weapons of mass destruction. Why then did India and her political ideologues not articulate more clearly India's strategic perspectives in the bipolar world that existed till 1991? Why were India's strategic thoughts and inputs not researched or placed on the record of referred journals to be noticed by the world intellectual community? Why, on the other hand, did the Nehruvian vision of non-alignment find a place of honour amongst the hawks of strategic articulation of deterrence theory and superpower nuclear rivalry? Why did the concept of nuclear non-proliferation supersede the combined intellectual acumen of non-nuclear states especially led by India?

The main reason was the priority of the Indian political elite to refrain from participating in the intellectual deliberations of the use and non-use of weapons of mass destruction except as end sufferers by postulating the moral and human rights aspects through the Gandhian philosophy of non-cooperation and outright rejection of any form of Western philosophical dimensions related to the management of conflict and violence. However, it appears that this paradigm of thoughts and action by India

contributed immensely to the protection of the superpower strategic interests – the US towards the establishment of free markets to exploit the natural resources of the developing countries, while the former Soviet Union concentrated on propagating the ideology of perpetuating controlled economies through geo-political strategic manoeuvres.

Indian Dilemma

Since the beginning of the Cold War, India suffered from three shortcomings. First, Nehru's relegating economics of the market to a minor position in diplomacy; second, his inability to understand the inevitable onslaught of the potential power of an information age in the making; and third, the long period of Nehru's leadership as prime minister. Devoid of the realist approach to the world order, the Nehruvian vision resulted in the incorporation of the world view that was based on the premise that there were only moral solutions to political problems. Translated into actual implementation, India incorporated central planning and state ownership in all strategic sectors of defence production and social welfare, including education, under the garb of mixed capitalistic economy. The private sector, thus, remained confined to producing consumer goods which accounted for less than 30 percent of the total outlay for national development.

The private sector in this process lost the ability to have any stake related to national security. There were no experts who could agree to disagree with Nehru publicly, either within

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the ruling party or in the Opposition. While Y B Chavan is a classic example of neutralisation by the then political architects, J R D Tata became the symbol of insensitivity of the government towards the private sector. National interest in the post-Nehru era was more or less ill-defined by politicians and pursued by an unwieldy bureaucracy which perpetuated the “license raj”. The entire period of the Cold War, thus, saw the primacy of strategic policy-making based on privilege information on a need to know basis. India fell into the trap of relying on bureaucratic outlooks and perceptions and being ever suspicious of any free thinking by any non-governmental individual or organisation. So much so that even the Service Chiefs of the armed forces were seldom consulted. The sharing of information, mundane or otherwise, was a taboo and the private entrepreneurs were viewed as animals who were only interested in profit-making and, hence, could not be patriotic to safeguard national interests.

The only organisation, which was not government owned, and driven by the right to the freedom of expression was the print media. Paradoxically, one comes across indirect evidence that the country was forced to be deprived of papers used for printing newspapers when adequate technology existed to manufacture the same in the country. Paper for news print was imported and rationed under strict supervision. This was to ensure that the size of any newspaper was controlled to ensure limited writings which would represent differing viewpoints critically examining issues and perspectives on national security. Coupled with lack of information related to strategic matters, the bureaucracy and the political leadership ensured that they remained in power by denying information to others which could be a

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basis of national debate on strategic perspectives. Even the radio and television were under the state supervision.

The Cultural Past

However, the Indian print media, with the capability to acquire information, thus, became a serious match for the bureaucrats having access to information. Under some of the famous editors/journalists like the late Girilal Jain, B G Verghese, Inder Malhotra and others, the national print media, through the editorial columns, became the conscience-keeper for Indian strategic rationale and also the vehicle to articulate rationally the government viewpoint. Interestingly, the era saw the rise of mavericks from amongst the civil servants on deputation to quasi-governmental organisations. Some of these individuals monopolised the entire gamut of strategic writings devoid of any research rigour. These writings were published in the national newspapers based more on insider’s knowledge of data or information, and formed the core of reactive governmental viewpoints towards global strategic issues articulated by the strategic analysts around the world during the golden age of classical bipolarity. The entire exercise and practice had a major effect. It kept the authors limited and licensed in which the academia, the industries and the professionals from all non-governmental bodies were screened out from giving their opinions on national security. Needless to record that the mediocrity prevalent in the social science disciplines also contributed to this malady. The epitaph, therefore, ran something like:

National security issues and deliberations are too serious a business to be indulged in by anyone else but those who have been authorised to do so by the government.

Security analysis was preferred over security studies, since the former based its premises on comparative military balances based on privilege data rather than indulging in security studies in which true power and the vitality of the nation state had to be based on the cultural and civilisational praxes incorporating the non-military dimensions of security (ecology, environment, pollution, energy, economic regimes, social and political, and civil society institutions, along with the issues of human rights).

Proper incorporation of security studies in institutes of higher education, on one side, and allowing the corporate and private sector to have a stake in security matters, on

the other, would have led to the evolution of strategic thinking to protect the core values and national interests of the nation. In the absence of such a paradigm, the bottom line of the entire development of the rationality of strategic thinking and projection was entrusted to the government-empowered regime which was constituted to ensure that strategically the country was administered to govern and not governed to administer. The virtual destruction of all democratic institutions, including political, was directly due to the political elites trying to establish committed organisations or individuals to safeguard the survival of the government in power.

Interestingly, no one, including those from the academic community, ever questioned as to why India had opted for a socialistic pattern of development and pursued a foreign policy which was operationalised and implemented by the Ministry of External Affairs whose personnel, when posted in India, lived in Delhi, and when abroad, lived in the capital city of the country to which they were posted. This highly “competent” manpower who also spent their sabbatical years of leave of absence in the premier academic institutions of the Western world, remained far away from the real India. They had no competitors from within India and, hence, faced no challenge intellectually, professionally or organisationally. Realistically, they could be considered as the real non-resident Indians (NRIs) of India all through the Cold War period.

The Change

Much has changed today and there is hope and optimism in the air as participation of agencies other than the state on security and discourse on strategy has increased. Decentralisation of empowerment to ‘think’ has occurred. The media has taken centre-stage to act as vigilante, and information is available to people. Publication and writings on security matters has nearly exploded. Various commissions have taken the centre-stage and the government has tacitly decided to leave areas of involvement which is none of their business to pursue, ranging from running hotels to imparting professional education in the information technology (IT) sector as a prime example. As the private universities are knocking on the door, even the Railways have started showing profits and announcing reward points while Brookings, Cargenie, Oxford, London

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School of Economics and similar institutions are seeking intellectual partnerships with private think-tanks and academic institutions where the government representatives are in attendance to learn and change their mindsets of the past. The success stories of the Mittals and Ambanis at both global and domestic levels to attract the best of minds for management and research shows the stake that the private sector will have on strategic areas of production and marketing. International relations and strategic partnerships in security issues will have strong economic ties as has been demonstrated in the recent developments in the Indo-US nuclear cooperation in the civil and military domains. Both the scientists and the military have given valuable inputs for the government to act upon to forge a historic breakthrough which would have been well nigh impossible to think about in the Cold War period. A definite role has even been played by the media which has employed a number of former academics from institutes of higher education. They are now working for the media by their studied writings and conducting well-informed talk shows. The media has also started outsourcing strategic issue-related debates on a regular basis in which the academics as well as spokespersons of political parties find their rightful place, demonstrating a new culture of protest as well as critical evaluation of policies on strategic matters.

Conclusion

There is a definite impact of neo-realism on India’s strategic thinking; the culture of strategic thinking has perceptively changed to become more realistic due to the participation of a variety of individuals, organisations and the private sector. The corporate sector giants have found a stake in national security affairs, indirectly to safeguard their business

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interests in major areas like energy, environment and intellectual property rights. Institutes of higher education have become sensitive to articulate issues on national security affairs through the conceptual lenses of various social science disciplines, using rigorous research methodologies documented with impeccable empirical evidences.

We are almost seeing the demise of narrative analysis undertaken by the social science discipline pursued in the last fifty years as a greater variety of researchers belonging to the scientific community has started taking interest in articulating on matters of “national security”. The establishment of the first National Centre of Strategic Studies in an Indian University by the University Grants Commission, the ongoing

endeavour over the years by the armed forces to establish the first National Defence University and similar efforts to create strategic studies institute by the Indian Police Services, the three wings of the armed forces and revamping of government supported think-tanks are indicative of a very healthy trend. The list of research institutes which can be considered as think-tanks in India includes the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi; Centre for South and South East Asian Studies, University of Madras, Chennai; Delhi Policy Group, New Delhi; Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, New Delhi; Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai; Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai; Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi; United Service Institution of India, New Delhi; Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi; Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi; National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi; Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi; Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi; Kashmir Bachao

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Andolan, Mumbai; National Council of Applied Economic Research, New Delhi; National Institute for Advanced Studies, Bangalore; Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi/ Mumbai/ Chennai/ Ahmedabad; SAPRA India Foundation, New Delhi; Strategic Foresight Group, Mumbai; South Asia Analysis Group, Noida, UP; Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi; Centre for Security Analysis, Chennai.

It will not be long before these efforts will be brought to fruition as India needs studied inputs for developing the strategic culture to enable her to become a part of the knowledge society and global strategic equations. It appears that the long awaited shift from the habits of advocacy to justify our national security and foreign policy formulation will be replaced by policies framed by rational understanding of the international system communicated to the international community by impeccable intellectual acumen. Lastly, we must recognise the Indian Diaspora which has started influencing the emerging strategic cultural thinking in India from outside in a significant way.



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Views expressed in this Issue Brief are those of the author and do not represent the views of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies.



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