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NATIONAL SECURITY: FROM EVOLUTION TO RE-EVALUATION OF 21st CENTURY INDIA

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Overview

The discourse on national security has evolved significantly over the years, reflecting the changing dynamics of global and regional threats. The views of political leadership play a crucial role in shaping national security strategies. For instance, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, in a recent interview, emphasised the importance of a robust and integrated approach to safeguarding India's national interests, stating that “every country has its own way of communication, its own way of policy formulation.”¹ Given India's unique geopolitical challenges, including its strategic position in South Asia, border disputes, and regional security dynamics, a well-articulated NSS is imperative to navigate these complexities effectively. However, the question leads to what exact form, conditions, and parameters are required to assess the course of action. This paper addresses these elements in formulating a comprehensive and effective strategy to ensure India's security against evolving global threats, integrating contemporary resolutions, comments, and assessments by senior security and military officials, along with real-time developments in the domain of national security. Additionally, this paper examines the evolution of national security discourse and underscores the need for a comprehensive National Security Strategy (NSS) for India. The methodology involves a review of statements from senior military officials and security personnel to provide a nuanced understanding of the current security landscape.

Introduction

The concept of ‘National Security’ emerged notably in the 17th century, especially with the ‘Peace of Westphalia’ in 1648, which established the idea of nations having sovereign control over their external security. This cultivated throughout the 20th century, alongside the geopolitical arena with numerous retrospections, reshaping and redefining approaches to defensive strategies. These were driven largely by the experiences and aftermath of two world wars and later, the Cold War. Defence, deterrence, and balance of power were now inhibited not only in official foreign policies

¹ NDTV Profit. (2024, December 17). “I’ll have to kill you, if I. . .”: S Jaishankar Schools Journo on India’s national security strategy [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QMdMzO_Pe0

but also in security policies. These strategy papers would be seen as a tactic appreciated by the proponent pillars of nation-building advisors such as Bismarck and Metternich.²

The very term of ‘National Security’ gained traction in 1943 with the United States’ political discourse at every level. This eventually led to the creation of the National Security Council (NSC), India, in 1998 with the awakening sentiment of resolving the absence of cooperation as well as the reconciliation of foreign and defence policies of a nation.³

The 21st century currently deals with a broad range of security concerns, reflecting on the branches of threats and endangerment evolving per time and form. To combat potential traditional, non-traditional, and new security threats, countries have also engaged in modernising security measures. National security has revolutionised spheres, majorly catering to the spectrums of intelligence and technology. India, as an emerging superpower today, is foreseeing maximum security concerns, internally and externally. South Asia itself has developed a volatile climate with regard to sovereignty and human security.

Perhaps the very recent developments with regard to change in Bangladesh’s political climate alongside anti-India sentiments with neighbouring countries have also significantly amputated the callings for a cohesively designed National Security Strategy.⁴ Strategy papers are organised national policy papers that reflect a country’s official security stance. Former Vice Chief of India’s Army Staff Lt. General Philip Campose (Retd.), citing India’s example, highlighted the consequences India has borne as a result of an absence of a cohesive doctrine policy. He states how, “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.”⁵

² Bartolotto, L. J. K. (2004). *THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY* (p.2). U.S.Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA, 17013-5050. 03 May 2004 <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA423358>

³ Ibid

⁴ Halder, S. “Prioritising Deterrence in India’s National Security Plans.” Observer Research Foundation , 10 Sept. 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/prioritising-deterrence-in-india-s-national-security-plans>.

⁵ Campose, P (2016). India’s National Security Strategy: Imperative of Integrating Defence Policy. *CLAWS Journal*,. https://archive.claws.in/images/journals_doc/52385527_1117566064_PhilipCampose.pdf.

Today, reflections of security doctrines and their input practices are seen in various developed nations such as the USA and France. While the aforementioned countries routinely venture with their doctrine upgradation, such as in the case of the USA's *National Security Strategy* and France's *Revue Stratégique* during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, India maintains an absence in the case of the same when external attacks are embarked on its territorial and other varied sovereignty. India, from its inception after independence, has faced a myriad of significant national security challenges. Thus, to decipher the importance of a strategy white paper, addressing its former measures is necessary.

Contemporary National Security Concern: From a Reminder to a Resolution

Since 2016, India has witnessed a rampant rise in terror threats primarily within the spectrum of new sources of threats compromising its sovereignty. India's position on its territorial integrity regarding Jammu & Kashmir has often resulted in producing mass casualties, both in civilian and security forces. These can be traced back to the cases of the 2016 Uri Base attack by the Jaish-e-Mohammed outfit or the 2019 Pulwama attack on the CRPF convoy by a suicide bomber of the aforementioned outfit. India's implementation to tackle these concerns led to the pursuit of the "Doval Doctrine" by NSA Ajit Doval, who sought the measures of "offensive-defensive" and "defensive-offensive" reflected in the URI surgical strike-2016 and Balakot air strikes-2019.⁶

Immediate resolutions to curb security challenges, however, do not reflect a sustainable alternative. It rather puts doubt on India's capabilities of traditional security measures. The lines between internal and external threats of traditional security seemingly thin out, necessitating a comprehensive and unified approach to safeguarding all aspects of India's national security. FairObserver mentions how General Bipin Rawat, the former Chief of Defence Staff, emphasised that India might confront challenges on two and a half fronts, while NSA Ajit Doval pointed out that civil society has become the new battleground. These observations are a stark reality of the

⁶ Sharma, S. (2023, December 19). India's national security evolution: Urgent need for comprehensive strategy. *Fair Observer*. <https://www.fairobserver.com/world-news/india-news/indias-national-security-evolution-urgent-need-for-comprehensive-strategy/>

evolving nature of security threats and dynamics, yet their full implications have yet to be realised in practice.⁷

Challenges

Past efforts on implementing nationwide security policies were made, such as the Kargil Review Committee in 1999 alongside the formation of the Defence Intelligence Agency in March 2002. These efforts aimed to bolster India's defensive capabilities and intelligence-gathering infrastructure. However, they underscored the persistent lack of a formalised and cohesive national security policy. The establishment of agencies such as the Kargil Review Committee, the Group of Ministers' Report, or the Naresh Chandra Committee also revealed significant strategic implications for the involved organisations and security forces involved.⁸ However, due to a lack of reforms, these efforts failed to modernise India's intelligence apparatus. Another crucial agency synonymous with security is intelligence. Significant intelligence failures have been a constant concern for India's security. 2020 stands as a critical example, with the clash between India and China along the Galwan Valley border resulting in casualties in both camps.⁹ Sumit Ganguly, a columnist at Foreign Policy, highlights that despite individual agencies reporting suspicious movements by Chinese troops in Ladakh between February and March, their intelligence was not acted upon by the authorities. Consequently, the Indian army had to play catch-up to counter the aggressive advances by Chinese forces.¹⁰ This can be viewed as India's failure at managing intelligence. Even with key organisations such as the Joint Intelligence Committee and Multi-Agency Centre (MAC), they aren't upgraded or equipped with strategic foresight to deal with immediate concerns. Prior to the Galwan Valley clash in 2020, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Arvind Kumar, highlighted instances where states' hesitance to share intelligence with the

⁷ Sharma, S. (2023, December 19). India's national security evolution: Urgent need for comprehensive strategy. *Fair Observer*. <https://www.fairobserver.com/world-news/india-news/indias-national-security-evolution-urgent-need-for-comprehensive-strategy/>

⁸ Dalmia, V. (2023, December 4). *India's enduring challenge of intelligence reforms*. orfonline.org. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/indias-enduring-challenge-of-intelligence-reforms>

⁹ Ganguly, S., & O'Donnell, F. (2020, August 28). China and Pakistan have been taking advantage of India's intelligence failures. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/27/india-china-galwan-intelligence-failure/>

¹⁰ Ibid

MAC disrupted the intelligence-gathering chain, a concern also raised in the parliamentary standing committee that year.¹¹

Negotiations also play a key role in the treatment of fragmented ties with neighbours with regards to security. The aforementioned Galwan dispute of 2020 intensified presence of the military along the LAC (Line of Actual Control). However, four years later, on October 21st, 2024, both nations did come to a consensus to disengage troops and fall back to their origin points at the LAC. This agreement marks a significant step towards de-escalation and restoring peace and tranquillity in the border areas.¹² A key asset to date remains diplomatic dialogue for security build-up among nations with conflicting interests. Although it may not necessarily invite fruitful outcomes, it sure can pave the way for a longer passage of balance of power.

More than ever, in today's time, every country needs to secure itself at all spectrums, even in regard to alliance building. India, alongside being an active member of the Quadrilateral Dialogue (QUAD), which is strengthening not only regional alliances but also India's participation in the QUAD, enhances its diplomatic influence and strengthens its strategic partnerships with key allies. India, by leveraging its strategic location, growing economic clout, and diplomatic influence, continues to contribute to the collective efforts of the QUAD in promoting a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, whose reflection was felt in the recent QUAD Summit in Delaware, USA.¹³ This is a reflection of India's alliance-building measures, considering its frequent neutral stance on various geopolitical matters and tensions, which are reflected through its powerful dialogues at the United Nations General Assembly. The 79th United Nations General Assembly also sought its

¹¹ Shemin Joy, DHNS, Shemin Joy, & DHNS. (2020, March 6). *Intelligence gathering: Multi-Agency Centre to spread to districts*. Deccan Herald. <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/intelligence-gathering-multi-agency-centre-to-spread-to-districts-811030.html>

¹² Firstpost Staff. (2024, October 21). India and China agree to disengage troops at LAC : What happened in Galwan, how pact was made and why it is significant. *Firstpost*. Retrieved from <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/india-china-to-disengage-at-lac-what-happened-in-galwan-how-pact-was-made-and-why-it-is-significant-13827721.html>

¹³ Miller, M. C. (2021, October 13). The Quad, AUKUS, and India's dilemmas. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/article/quad-aukus-and-indias-dilemmas>

commendation towards India's commitment to collective action and multilateralism for human security.^{14,15}

Future prospects: Revisions in Core Policy are the Need of the Hour

On November 20, a discussion on "future wars and the armed forces" was held at an event hosted by the India International Centre, featuring the Chief of Defence Staff, Lt Gen Anil Chauhan, in dialogue with NN Vohra, the former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. The session was moderated by former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran. The importance of the session was highlighted as the question of a National Security Policy was reiterated within strategic circles. In response, it was hinted by General Chauhan that "There will be one, people are working at it."¹⁶ The discussions further underscored the ongoing efforts to ensure that India's security strategy is robust, well-coordinated, and capable of addressing both conventional and emerging threats.

It has become more than an imperative cause for India's security policy to instate all possibilities of deterrence. Lt Gen Raj Shukla, at the Rasina Debates, formulated a comprehensive strategy, the closest strategy that can be considered as a contemporary reflection of what India's security policy should primarily adhere to. Lt. Gen. Raj Shukla outlined a five-point roadmap for '*India's National Security and Strategic Deterrence*,' focusing on enhancing air defences, modernising military capabilities, strengthening strategic deterrence, improving power projection, and ensuring comprehensive security measures.¹⁷ These solutions also undertook lessons from recent developments of security breaches laterally (as in the case of the October 7th attack).

¹⁴ Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York. (2024). India's Commitment to Global Solidarity: Emphasizing Security, Climate Change, and Human Rights. *Permanent Mission of India to the UN*. Retrieved from <https://pminewyork.gov.in>

¹⁵ Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, New York. (2024). The 79th UNGA Session: Highlighting India's Role in Multilateralism. *Permanent Mission of India to the UN*. Retrieved from <https://pminewyork.gov.in>

¹⁶ The Tribune India. (2024, November 20). CDS take on written policy vital for national security. *The Tribune India*. Retrieved from <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/india/cds-take-on-written-policy-vital-for-national-security/>

¹⁷ Shukla, R. (2024, July 25). National Security priorities for Modi 3.0: Finessing India's strategic deterrence. *ORF Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/national-security-priorities-for-modi-3-0-finessing-india-s-strategic-deterrence>

He asserted the requirement of an upgraded air defence system with a comprehensive review of India's air defence posture as compared to those of these highly volatile zones. It is alarming with regards to China's technological prowess of its lethal, cutting-edge missiles with utmost precision capabilities, which can endanger '*border towns and heartland cities*.' A comprehensive review of air defence strategies, incorporating new technologies like laser-based systems (e.g., Iron Beam) and enhanced coordination with allies, is indeed crucial to address these sophisticated threats.¹⁸

Secondly, as a deterrence measure, India can adopt an Integrated Drone Missile Force. This approach leverages the cost-effectiveness and versatility of drones, which can carry various payloads such as surveillance equipment and precision-guided munitions. The integration allows for enhanced real-time intelligence and situational awareness, improving the efficiency of targeted strikes. Additionally, drones' stealth capabilities and agility make them harder to detect and intercept, providing a strategic advantage. By incorporating drones with missile systems, India can create a multi-layered defence strategy that ensures rapid deployment and minimises risks to human operators, thereby strengthening the nation's overall security framework.¹⁹

In the modern era, data has become a crucial weapon system for advanced militaries, incorporating the newest generation of war as seen in contemporary war tactics. As attack surfaces expand, the margin for error diminishes, and decision cycles shorten, it is imperative to invest significantly in the triad of data, algorithms, and computation. Effective management, security, and utilisation of data can enhance operational effectiveness. The Defence Services must increase their computing power, unlock data potential, and develop defence-specific Large Language Models (LLMs) to transform the Indian military into an AI-driven combat force. This strategic focus could serve as a critical component in addressing China's growing influence asymmetrically.²⁰

Fourth reflects onto the policy of self-reliance, coined by the lieutenant as "Aatmanirbharta in Defense" (AID). It reflects on three prolonged approaches: cultural change, developing capacities in strategic technologies, and upgrading combat stockpiles. The idea of moving beyond the L-1 bidding system and fostering a culture of talent development can help create "National Champions

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

in Defence." Supporting MSMEs, startups, and private companies will ensure they can meet domestic needs and compete internationally. Examples from global defence corporations, like China's NORINCO and US-based Anduril, highlight the importance of government support. India needs to develop its own competitive defence majors.²¹

Fifth, enhancing our power projection capabilities is essential, not to become an aggressive military force, but to enable interventions at greater distances when necessary. Key areas of focus should include developing long-range stealth capabilities, enhancing our ability to project power across critical chokepoints like the Malacca Strait, and significantly upgrading our capacities in space and cyber domains.²²

Way Forward

In light of the evolving security landscape, India must ensure a few considerations in order to achieve a robust and effective national security framework. India has to invest in the field of technology in order to enhance its technological readiness with international collaborations. It is evident with India's trade deals with France and the U.S. regarding arms, ammunition and Dassault Rafales. This can also be seen with India's recent order of 26 Rafael Marine Jets from France.²³

Alongside is the need for prioritising research security. India can safeguard its advancements in strategic technologies and maintain a competitive edge in the global arena, thereby contributing to national security and technological sovereignty. This approach is crucial for protecting sensitive data, intellectual property, and research infrastructure from threats such as foreign interference, cyberattacks, and intellectual property theft. Ensuring robust research security measures will help India continue to innovate and lead in critical sectors like space, defence, semiconductors, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence.²⁴

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Economic Times. (2024, December 3). *India to buy 26 Rafale Marine jets from France; deal 'at final stages'*. Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-to-buy-26-rafale-marine-jets-from-france-deal-at-final-stages/videoshow/115908743.cms>

²⁴ The Hindu. (2024, December 3). *Research security should be a national priority*. *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/research-security-should-be-a-national-priority/article68935590.ece>

Lastly, crucial collaboration between the national security agency and R&AW (Research & Analytical Wing) should be factored in. The appointment of a new Additional National Security Advisor (ANSA) on July 1st, 2024, stages a significant measure.²⁵ This collaboration involves streamlining intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination between the NSA and R&AW. By fostering strong inter-agency cooperation, the NSA can ensure that all relevant information is shared promptly and effectively, allowing for more comprehensive and informed decision-making. Establishing standardised communication protocols, conducting joint training exercises, and developing integrated intelligence platforms are key initiatives to break down silos between agencies and create a unified front against both internal and external threats.²⁶

Conclusion

India, more than ever, is in need of a formulated Security Strategy Paper reflecting its core policies and the tenets of capacity building alongside the articulation of military doctrines in order to combat any external or internal threat. This is imperative in all spheres of security, from the military to the National Security Guard to our police forces. Elements of modern warfare, including cyber defence and space security, should also be an innate part of it to ensure that India is prepared for contemporary threats. Additionally, it should outline protocols for intelligence sharing and coordination among various security agencies to create a unified and efficient security apparatus. By integrating these components, India can establish a robust framework to safeguard its national interests and promote regional stability. Even with numerous esteemed speakers and experts assessing the chances of such a doctrine in the due making, it is with time that citizens can expect a robust framework to appear to safeguard the country's national interests.

²⁵ Civildaily. (2024, July 1). Appointment of the new Additional National Security Advisor (ANSA). Retrieved from <https://www.civildaily.com/news/appointment-of-the-new-additional-national-security-advisor-ansa/>

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