

# CONTOURS OF NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY AND MILITARY STRATEGY FOR INDIA

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*“Changing geo-politics and geo-strategic equations directly impact our National Security..... We in India must therefore develop a sound strategy through a robust policy framework in order to manage and resolve future challenges faced by us.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Shri Rajnath Singh, Hon’ble Raksha Mantri*

## **Abstract**

*India aspires to be a strong, prosperous and modern power. We are witnessing an intense power play between the US and China, with the former shifting focus to the Indo Pacific. India has border disputes with China and Pakistan, both of whom are also colluding to pose more threats. Pakistan’s proxy war in J&K and China’s increasing influence in our neighborhood have only added to our concerns. The Galwan clashes were an inflection point in India-China relations and for security in the region.*

*National security, today, encompasses many critical facets, which need to be integrated. It is time that we formalize the national security strategy and military strategy, and place it in the open domain*

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<sup>1</sup> Shri Rajnath Singh, Hon’ble Raksha Mantri, Convocation Address at NDC, New Delhi, 07 March 2020, (<https://www.rajnathsingh.in> accessed on 23 June 2021)

*for discussion and refinement. This will give an impetus to various levers of the nation to help secure India in the best possible manner.*

## **Introduction**

India aspires to be a strong, prosperous and modern power. Our national security should comprise how we safeguard our nation's existence and protect its vital interests. Since this involves multifarious and often complex aspects it would demand a set of guiding principles that lead to sound decision making at all levels. In other words, a national security strategy for India would help in planning of the ways and means to achieve key national objectives.

Similarly, a military/ defence strategy would provide a clear roadmap as to how we lay down military objectives, specify the required resources and work out a way in which to accomplish those objectives. It would also obviate any gaps in our preparation or a stretch caused by ambitious plans.

Presently such strategies are not in the public domain. Once these are disseminated, it will provide a common understanding about the challenges faced by us, how we intend to tackle them and provide a unity of purpose to numerous levers of our nation which prosecute them. It will help not only in judicious resource allocation and optimum risk management within the country but also to indicate our intent worldwide.

## **Geostrategic Scan**

Today we are witnessing an intense power play between the US and China in global leadership and influence. While China is asserting itself in economic and military aspects, the US has refocused its energies to the Indo-Pacific region. The EU and UK are constantly being challenged by Russia, who is attempting to regain the position it once had in global affairs. The Middle East is in turmoil with battles involving Israel, Iran, Turkey, Syria and Yemen with some resulting in large scale

migrations. Afghanistan is the scene of an US exit after two decades and destabilization due to Taliban's bid to grab power. Chinese influence in Africa and Latin America has meanwhile grown immensely. Australia's stance after the pandemic has led to economic coercion by China. Al Qaeda, ISIS and other terrorist networks are active in many parts of the world. The Covid-19 pandemic is affecting everyone concurrently.

Looking at our region, China has adopted a belligerent attitude towards us, particularly after the Doklam incident in 2017. There had been standoffs in Ladakh before, but after the Galwan clash, Chinese deployment and infrastructure developments in 2020 revealed their blatant attempt to alter the LAC, violating existing CBMs and agreements in vogue since 1995. These clashes have become an inflection point in our future relations with China and for security in the region.

Pakistan's hostility towards India has often manifested through its abetment to cross border terrorism in J&K, which led to our retaliatory air strike, after the Pulwama incident. Further, Pakistan has been spending hugely on defence procurements and sustenance. It has been helping the Taliban in Afghanistan and hopes to reap dividends soon. The emerging Afghanistan situation and a fragile economy, seem to have pushed it towards implementing ceasefire with us. "With the ceasefire holding on the Line of Control in the last few weeks, there is growing optimism about the prospects for a dialogue between India and Pakistan".<sup>2</sup> China has been bolstering Pak in diplomatic, economic and military spheres. CPEC, as part of the BRI helps China gain access to the Arabian Ocean through Gwadar.

Simultaneously, China has enhanced its long-term presence in our neighbouring countries in South Asia, through huge economic loans, construction projects, labour, military equipment, digital infrastructure, maintenance and training initiatives. This is impacting our relations with these neighbours adversely.

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<sup>2</sup> C Raja Mohan, For Pakistani army chief it's the economy, stupid, Tripping on Geoeconomics, Indian Express, 31 March 2021.

## **National Security Strategy**

Every nation intends to secure itself comprehensively. Primarily national power is anchored on the diplomatic, economic and military pillars, bound together by the information one. In an interconnected world, other dimensions such as internal security, human security, science and technology, education, health and bio-security, climate, energy, and cyber, by themselves and in combination, also determine how secure a nation is or will be. Any setback in these dimensions could well undermine national security, as being witnessed in the pandemic now. National power being relative, national interest could make nations partner with friendly countries to achieve desired national security.

**National security objectives could then be enumerated as given below:-**

- (a) Protect our sovereignty.
- (b) Ensure our territorial integrity.
- (c) Secure our people's well-being and interests.
- (d) Preserve our way of life.

## **Progressing Externally**

UN has been instrumental for global peace over the last seven decades. India must continue striving hard to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. As a leading developing country, we can then champion climate-change, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity and other such important causes.

In the multipolar world today, we must strive hard to pursue 'strategic autonomy. Relations with the US have prospered in the last two decades, where we are a Major Defence Partner and member of a revitalized Quad now. These must be taken to the next level. Also, relations with Russia, which has steadily supported us, should be progressed deftly. Greater economic and security partnerships with EU and UK continue to be important. New opportunities emerging in our relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE will help our huge diaspora, improve our connect with Islamic nations and influence Pakistan to alter its behaviour with us.

After the 2020 clashes China has probed India's vulnerabilities in the economic, cyber and information domains, which need to be guarded against. Due to globalization trade with China will remain appreciable, till we build alternative supply chains. Some environmental issues could see a convergence, but Chinese plans for more dams on the Tibetan Plateau could create greater water scarcity for us and hence must be challenged.

FATF has generated a lot of pressure on Pakistan which should be kept up, till the latter desists from supporting terror groups. This aids our national security. The situation in Afghanistan is complex and if Taliban mainstreams itself politically, we could be open for talks with them.

We have to continue strengthening our relations with immediate neighbours, especially Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar and progress connectivity, trade, tourism, medical assistance and IT initiatives. Pursuing BIMSTEC cooperation vigorously and helping others in the IOR will deliver rich dividends.

### **Strengthening Internal Security**

The internal security situation in India is facing challenges due to the ongoing terrorism in J&K, insurgencies in the North East and Left-Wing Extremism. The threat of Al Qaeda and ISIS in the future can also not be discounted. We remain prone to agitations on grounds of religion, caste, creed, language, ethnicity, labour, farming and such other issues, which can be exploited by any adversary.

The unrest in J&K has been prevalent for over three decades. Over the years Pakistan has been aiding separatist ideology, facilitating infiltration and financing terror in J&K. The situation is improving gradually. "Due to the persistent efforts of security forces, terrorist incidents in 2020 when compared with 2019 decreased by about 63%".<sup>3</sup> With the new ceasefire in vogue with Pakistan on the Line of Control since March 2021, the border areas should be more peaceful. A lot can be done to

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, Year End Review 2020, PIB, GoI, 07 Jan 2021, pp1.

assuage the concerns of the people, some of whom are alienated. A whole of Govt approach would necessitate winning their hearts and minds by empowering them in terms of political participation, education, health, local industry, enterprise and tourism initiatives. As the emerging Afghan situation could impact J&K adversely, efforts must be accelerated.

The North East has been the scene of some of the oldest insurgencies in India. Demographic turmoil, identity issues, ethnic discord, illegal migration, lack of development, porous borders, and a desire for autonomy have contributed to this situation and led to legacy issues. The Govt has been able to carve out Ceasefire/ 'Suspension of operations' agreements with some insurgent groups to usher in temporary peace. While violence levels have reduced in recent years, unlawful activities have not abated. The current situation in Myanmar has also impacted the North East. We need to enable greater political empowerment, communicate effectively with local communities, continue talks with the insurgent groups, improve development of the region and govern better. The North East is a launch pad for our Act East Policy. A stable situation here, benefits the nation immensely.

Left Wing Extremism has plagued us for over a decade. "The last six years have seen significant decline in LWE violence as well as the geographical spread of LWE".<sup>4</sup> The extremists operate largely from dense and remote forests aided by discontented tribals, who have been disempowered from their land, water and other resources, impacted due to deforestation and deprived of good governance. While strengthening of the intelligence mechanism and inter-state coordination have been done, the police forces could do with better training and equipment. The LWE ideological narrative will have to be countered effectively in the affected areas, apart from enabling the tribal communities and ensuring better livelihood.

### **Improving Core Strengths**

The most fundamental of inner strengths of a nation is its economy,

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, Annual Report 2019-2020, Govt of India, Para 2.25, pp16.

which determines the overall prosperity. “India’s GDP shrank by 7.3% to Rs 135.13 trillion in 2020-21 (in real terms adjusted for inflation)”.<sup>5</sup> The Govt needs to improve the present state equitably, through its fiscal policy interventions and enable greater employment, price stability and growth rate. Simultaneously, the RBI will have to craft a pragmatic monetary policy to keep inflation in check. A look at certain key economic sectors becomes pertinent.

“Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for about 58% of India’s population”.<sup>6</sup> As agriculture enables our food security and provides work for bulk of our people, there is a need to maximise our production, conserve our natural resources and look for sustainable technologies through scientific research. Improvement of farmer education, digital connectivity to markets, agri-information base and access to latest techniques becomes essential.

“Industry forms about 25.92% of our GDP”,<sup>7</sup> drives growth and provides jobs. It is also vital to our self-reliance and for our Atmanirbhar-Bharat mission. For this, basic infrastructure facilities in the country need a huge upgrade. Physical and digital connectivity, warehousing, supply chain management, computer and mobile penetration would have to be enhanced manifold. There is enough scope for the industry to grow and provide livelihood to many.

With greater urbanisation, the services sector will grow significantly from the 53.89% (GVA) share of the GDP. Indian IT/ITeS and Fin tech companies, healthcare, tourism, logistics and transportation, media, sports and entertainment contribute to this sector. We need to continuously upskill our enterprising youth and make this sector cater for regional and global needs.

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5 Vivek Kaul, India’s GDP contracted by 7.3% in 2020-21, with revival postponed to 2022-23, Mint, 31 May 2021, (<https://www.livemint.com> accessed on 12 June 2021).

6 Snapshot on Indian Agriculture and Allied Industries Report, March 2021, (<https://www.ibef.org> accessed on 07 June 2021)

7 Statisticstimes, Sector-wise GDP of India, 17 Jan 2021, (<https://www.statisticstimes.com> accessed on 23 June 2021)

As India aspires to become a leading global economic power, its energy demands will increase for its industries, manufacturing, infrastructure development and better quality of living. “Coal fulfils 44% of our energy demand<sup>8</sup> while oil provides 25%”.<sup>9</sup> Import of oil implies greater dependency and Current Account Deficit. Distribution of power needs to be fixed to improve energy efficiency. In the short term we can increase domestic coal production and endeavour more efficient solar energy and bio gas utilisation. In the long term a number of potential non-conventional energy alternatives will have to be explored. Building up of strategic petroleum reserves for contingencies also needs to be further augmented.

Science and technology provide us the platform to speedily make India modern. While we have progressed reasonably in the past, a lot needs to be done in terms of patents, publications and the quality of research for a country of our size. “Keeping in mind the impediments to worthwhile scientific research, a National Research Foundation has been set up to expand the ecosystem, coordinate and integrate across various establishments”.<sup>10</sup> The fruits of this initiative and the dedication of an enhanced pool of scientists and technocrats will make us more technologically secure for the future.

Cybersecurity has gained immense importance. With a number of critical services riding on the ICT bandwidth globally and hardware devices resourced from various parts of the world, cybersecurity poses a challenge. “The challenges arise from nation states, non-state actors and individuals (who) are at a peer level, all capable of waging attacks.<sup>11</sup> India needs to protect its critical digital infrastructure, gateways and data sets. “The reason why cyber- attacks are launched with a degree of impunity is that attribution of these attacks to a nation state is extremely difficult”<sup>12</sup> Facing such ambiguity, protection would become difficult and

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8 IEA India 2020 Energy Policy Review, pp 229, (<https://niti.gov.in> accessed on 17 June 2021)

9 *ibid*, pp 249.

10 National Research Foundation 2020, (<https://www.psa.gov.in> accessed on 08 June 2021)

11 Dr VK Saraswat, Member Niti Aayog, Cybersecurity, (<https://www.niti.gov.in> accessed on 08 June 2021)

12 Lt Gen DS Hooda, The trajectory for future wars, India Today, 03 January 2020, (<https://www.indiatoday.in> accessed on 26 Jun 2021)



retaliation more so. We will need a pragmatic policy as part of our cyber strategy. Simultaneously we must make our systems resilient through indigenization of various hardware, software and operating systems.

Every Indian aspires towards living a decent ‘way of life’, for which education and health are key factors. “The Human Capital Index 2020 (World Bank data) for India stands at 0.49, a measure of productivity of the next generation of workers relative to the benchmark of complete education and full health”.<sup>13</sup> To capitalize on our demographic dividend, we need to educate and skill our youth for a strong work force. “We are increasing healthcare spending to 2.2 trillion Indian rupees (\$ 30.20 billion) to help improve public health systems as well as the huge vaccination drive to immunize 1.3 billion people”<sup>14</sup>. But more is necessary for health outlay. Bio-security also needs greater attention at the apex level, given our present experience with the pandemic.

Climate change too threatens India’s national security. Our coastline of about 7500 km is periodically affected by rise in water levels, cyclones and other ecological disasters. “By the end of the twenty-first century, average temperature of India is projected to rise by approximately 4.4 deg C, relative to the recent past under the RCP 8.5 scenario”.<sup>15</sup> Himalayan glaciers are retreating, causing avalanches, flash floods and landslides more frequently. Coal power stations, industry, transportation and stubble burning are giving rise to huge air pollution, and leading to long term health risks. Water depletion is resulting in parched lands. We will have to develop fast, while overcoming these challenges. The risk mitigation measures will imply having coal use caps, promoting renewable energies, water conservation, audit of energy consumption and enhancing public awareness.

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13 The World Bank, “The Human Capital Index 2020 Update: Human Capital in the time of Covid-19.” (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org> accessed on 07 June 2021)

14 NDTV, India doubles healthcare spending, more FDI allowed in insurance, 01 February 2021. (<https://www.ndtv.com> accessed on 27 June 2021)

15 Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region, A Report of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2020, pp xiv.

## Military Strategy

Much as we desire peace, we would need to be cognizant of the adversarial attitude of our neighbours, China and Pakistan, both of whom have border disputes with us. China has greatly benefited from Pakistan's hostile actions against India. It has consolidated itself in Tibet, and built up its military infrastructure there. China's restructuring of the PLA, military modernization and formulation of its Active Defence Strategy indicate its belligerence. "Permanent terminal objectives even in the event of a full-scale war are most likely to be Chinese perception of his traditional borders which in Ladakh are close to the current LAC and in the Eastern Front includes the state of Arunachal Pradesh"<sup>16</sup>. It is likely to pursue military coercion, fixing our forces on the Northern borders and constraining our maritime power in the Indian Ocean. This portends more friction points in the coming decade.

"Pakistan, on the other hand, has been following a policy of a 'thousand cuts', against India"<sup>17</sup>. It relies on Proxy War and propagates the threat of using tactical nuclear missiles to offset its conventional asymmetry with India. Concurrently it has armed itself with Chinese equipment such as JF 17 aircraft, Al Khalid tanks, submarines, missile technology, rocket launchers and UAVs.

"There is increased cooperation between Pakistan and China, both in military and non-military fields. A two front situation is something we must be ready to deal with."<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, though the Pakistan Army Chief has recently stated "we feel that it is time to bury the past and move forward"<sup>19</sup> it would be prudent to keep up our guard, especially as collusion between China and Pakistan is a possibility, with increasing

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16 Lt Gen PR Kumar (Retd), India – China standoff: Need to be prepared for two-and-half front war (Part III of three-part series), 26 June 2020, (<https://www.southasiamonitor.org> accessed on 26 June 2021)

17 Lt Gen Harwant Singh (Retd), Pakistan's policy of a thousand cuts, The Tribune, 08 April 2016.

18 Dinakar Peri, Will hold our ground along LAC: Gen Naravane, The Hindu, 12 January 2021, (<https://www.thehindu.com> accessed on 21 Jun 21)

19 Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, Address at National Security Dialogue, 18 March 2021, (<https://www.dawn.com> accessed on 17 June 2021)

exercises, training and build-up of war-waging potential. In fact, at worst, India could face a two and half (insurgency) front war.

### **Military Objectives**

In the prevailing environment we could attempt the following military objectives:-

- (a) Deter adversaries from carrying out any aggression.
- (b) Defend the integrity of our operating domains. If war is forced upon us, end it on a favourable note.
- (c) Assist to ensure internal security, when necessary.
- (d) Provide aid to civil authorities, Humanitarian assistance and Disaster relief, and Peacekeeping Operations when required.
- (e) Become self-sufficient in defence equipment, ammunition and sustenance.

### **Strategy**

The military strategy in a conflict against either or both the adversaries would be specific and depend upon the circumstances and type of conflict we are involved in, calibrated by the desired level of escalation. The military strategy broadly could be on the following lines-

- (a) As part of the Whole of Govt approach, integrate with other agencies and respond appropriately to any external threat with credible military force.
- (b) Maintain our operational readiness to fight in situations ranging from 'short of war' to a full spectrum conflict against our adversaries.
- (c) Develop requisite capabilities to ensure deterrence, enabled by necessary planning, equipping, infrastructure and training of our individual and joint forces.

(d) Usher in greater jointmanship by assigning combat responsibilities to theatre commands, revising doctrines and training methods for efficient resource utilization and achieving synergy in operations.

(e) When employed for internal security, assist Govt efforts by bringing the security situation under control.

(f) Assist the defence-industrial complex on military specific requirements, trials and validation.

(g) Be ready to sustain full scale operations for 30 days with adequate equipment and ammunition reserves.

The nature of war remains the same and involves the imposition of one's will on the other. However, it's the character of war, primarily tools and methods, that is undoubtedly changing rapidly. We will need to keep a close watch for developments by our adversaries to pick up any changes and tailor our strategy accordingly.

### **Building Capabilities**

At present the three services possess certain capabilities which will optimally increase once jointmanship is enhanced. However, in future we would need to augment the capabilities of each service and further strengthen our cyber and space forces to meet emerging threats.

#### **The land capabilities could be built up in the following manner:-**

(a) Improve our border infrastructure (rail, road, airstrips and helipads) to enable swift mobilization and movement of forces.

(b) Enhance intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance means, qualitatively and quantitatively, while integrating with decision making and firepower entities.

(c) Develop customized rapid response forces (Mountain and Plains - integrated battle groups) for application.

(d) Fill up voids and upgrade vintage equipment.

**The air capabilities could be planned as follows:-**

- (a) Replace the depleting fighter squadrons with a suitable mix of 'State of the art' and indigenous platforms.
- (b) Augment force multiplier effect with Air-to-Air refuellers, AWACS and AEW&C aircrafts.
- (c) Modernise the transport and helicopter fleets for speedy inter-theatre and intra-theatre movement.
- (d) Increase mix of UAVs and loitering PGMs in air vectors.
- (e) Improve airborne and ground sensors, counter-UAV measures and other weapon systems.

The maritime capabilities are the key to our consolidation as a regional power and its projection. It needs to be enhanced further through:-

- (a) Conventional and nuclear attack submarine fleets.
- (b) Minesweepers and anti-submarine ships.
- (c) Unmanned aerial and underwater platforms.
- (d) Naval Utility and Multi-role helicopters.

In addition, the three services must improve combat infrastructure and train as part of joint forces to fight in envisaged scenarios, including under CBRN conditions. They should plan and integrate cyber, space, electronic warfare and information warfare capabilities for joint operations in a multi domain environment. In future we may have to counter the adversary's capabilities on AI, quantum computing and robotics on the battlefield, which will pose newer challenges. With the employment of new technologies in warfare, the 'system of systems' will change for which our strategies and tactics will have to be altered. We need to make greater investments in future technologies, especially pertaining to space and cyber domains.

As we go forward, the services and joint forces will need to rework force structures for future combat. Models would have to be laid out, test bedded and improved as we proceed ahead. The operational transition

from single service to theatre commands, in this milieu, would need careful consideration and deft steering.

## **Conclusion**

The world is currently in the midst of a great power competition between US and China. China's economic and military power are posing new challenges to many nations. India has been particularly affected by the clashes with China on the LAC and the pandemic. The growing asymmetry between us could encourage China to coerce us from time to time. On the other hand, Pakistan is continuing with its hostility towards us and its proxy war in J&K. The probability of conflict-situations that are 'short of war' remains high. At worst, we could even be fighting a two and half front war. Under the circumstances a comprehensive national security strategy and a focused military strategy are urgently needed.

Economic power is key to our development. A potent military can only be developed based on a strong economy. Keeping in mind the threats, the services will need a greater budget, once the economy normalizes. Only then would they be able to secure the nation robustly.

The national security strategy and military strategy should be made known to the public for an informed debate over the subject. A critical appraisal will definitely drive its further refinement. It would also strategically communicate our national interests and how we intend safeguarding them. Finally, national resilience would always be vital for the success of any national security strategy.

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