

ADDRESSING THE INTERNAL AND NON TRADITIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES – GAPS AND PRIORITISED PATHWAYS

Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM (Retd)*

This needs to commence with a full understanding of the term ‘security’ since it helps demarcate traditional from non-traditional. Security of a nation essentially involves the well-being of the people, their land, sovereignty, resources, heritage, sentiments and aspirations. As long as people can work towards and bear hope to achieve their aspirations they can be classified as secure. National security is also sometimes described as the requirement to ensure the survival of the state through the use of economic power, diplomacy, power projection and political power. However, there will always be some factors and trends which prevent people and the nation from achieving goals. These are mostly classified as threats and can be of diverse kinds. Out of these the well-known and long considered traditional threats are primarily military in nature and in earlier years remained centre stage in the security spectrum. They fall in the conventional and sub conventional domains and involve deliberate attempts at destruction, subjugation and imposition of will, by physical means, causing disruption in the way of life of a society and preventing its advancement or progress. Since the end of World War II the propensity to employ conventional means has diluted due to the development of deterrence by various means; this includes weapons of mass destruction and air power. The usage of the sub conventional domain, however, has increased due to the lower cost and risks involved. After the end of the Cold War sub conventional has largely been the dominant domain.

Non-traditional security challenges are almost the opposite of traditional security threats and refer to the factors other than military. The broad understanding is that these are largely threats to the survival and development of a sovereign state and its citizenry as a whole due to trends of nature, abuse of nature and manmade phenomena. They are caused by diverse factors such as climate change, pandemics, disasters, migration, resource scarcity, human trafficking and even corruption which eats into the development of society. A debate continues whether domains such as cyber, trans-national crime, economic warfare and the most common one of today, information warfare, all of which are human initiated and controlled, fit into the mode of non-traditional threats. I may not wish to legislate on this as it is a debate unto itself. For the purpose of this essay we will presume that all these do lie within the ambit of non-traditional threats and combinations of these with various threats in the sub conventional domain can be also classified as hybrid threats if we are not dogmatic about the exact definition. What probably helps classify all these as non-traditional is that governments the world over are struggling to overcome the combined effects of these threats. The Coronavirus pandemic, repeated cyber-attacks, the effects of climate change especially with many countries failing to work enough towards meeting the Paris and other protocols, rise in natural disasters, the effect of migrations due to civil war and forced economic and social conditions form some of the threats. Further, even the displacement of migrant labour and deliberate efforts at economic warfare forcing an economic downturn by targeting sectors such as energy and shipping, all form a part of the non-traditional security spectrum.

This essay focuses on a few non-traditional security challenges and specific issues of internal security related to these; a comprehensive address all of the full range being constrained by space. The larger subject of sub conventional domain does not find mention here.

Pandemics

Commencing with pandemics I recall that in 1998 while researching non-military threats of that time I was surprised to learn that if the

HIV virus hit India in a serious way the nation would lack the ability to provide sufficient hospital beds and so many would be involved in looking after the sick that it would drive the population to despair. It was also then that I learnt of the 1918-20 pandemic immediately following the Great War. Between 50 million to 70 million died worldwide and the greatest sufferer was undivided India with 12-17 million deaths. Not enough has been written on this pandemic and research on it has been lacking despite the full knowledge that India was the worst affected. Considering this a hundred years later as the Coronavirus hit the world the medical infrastructure in India was still below par. Urban centres and metropolises failed the rush resulting in near paralysis and deep psychological breakdown in segments of the population. The psycho-social domain became of the more pronounced areas of concern, nation wide. Rural India too has simply no means to cater for the levels of morbidity witnessed. Among the major lessons learnt is that pandemics affect national security with four prime areas being most affected; the economy, psyche of the people, societal cohesiveness, and the plight of the poor, especially those who are migrant labour in urban settings. With aspirations at a high due to good economic performance of the last many years the economic downturn of -7 percent upset the nation's confidence. The feasibility of Coronavirus being manmade lays open the path of experiments in bio warfare. India did extremely well to research and develop vaccines against Coronavirus in a very quick timeframe confirming its reputation of being the world's pharmacy. However, gaps remain to be overcome through enhanced research undertaken by aided institutions in conjunction with international partners, creation of efficient data management centres and an effective communication strategy to bring all on a common platform of perception of the existent dangers and the actions underway. Without going into any detailed statistics it is broadly understood by the common man that the pandemic has put India back by at least ten years. The feasibility of manmade virus as a part of biological warfare or accidental leakages will remain a major threat to both developing and developed countries. Mutations of the current virus may continue for some years forcing a complete alteration in the way of existence of the world.

Disaster Management and Climate Change

In the perception of the National Disaster Management Authority of India a disaster is a serious natural or manmade event occurring over a short or long period of time that causes widespread disruption of normalcy and human, material, economic or environmental loss which exceeds the ability of the 'affected community or society' to cope using its own resources. Till Dec 2005 India continued to take an old world and rather unprofessional approach to disaster management. The focus was only on response, employing untrained resources. There was no system of early warning, technology enhancement for mitigation, preparedness or efforts towards organizing community based disaster risk reduction. The Disaster Management Act of Dec 2005 transformed this domain completely. A National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) and a National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was set up. The focus shifted to preparedness, training, early warning, technology development, mitigation and build back better. 31 guidelines for different hazards have been published along with the latest National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) 2019. Insistence on the states developing their SDMPs and every Ministry at the Centre along with important institutions also developing their DM Plans has ensured a greater awareness and improvement of the culture of preparedness. However, this is work in progress, with lots of scope for international cooperation and incorporation of best practices. The Prime Minister has personally given a Ten Point program for Disaster Risk Mitigation which provides a suitable national vision to work upon.

While DM is a field where there has been considerable improvement even with much scope remaining for more we must remain conscious of the fact that disasters cause huge financial loss to nations thus affecting national aspirations. Jun-Oct 2019 monsoon floods caused India a loss of \$10 billion to be the seventh costliest ever. They also led to the death of 1,750 people — the most among all natural disasters in 2019. Cyclone Fani, which affected Odisha in India and Bangladesh, was the tenth-most costly natural disaster in the world, according to the report. There will always remain a gap between the capability and

the rising tide of hazards, both natural and manmade. Little is realized by states and institutions that investment in the field of preparedness and capacity development in response capability will actually lead to savings in the long run. A state such as Uttarkhand which is so heavily dependent on religious tourism will always remain in dilemma regarding development since this adversely affects the ecology of the fragile mountainous terrain. Broadening of roads, cutting of trees and tunneling the mountains will cause an upset in the ecological balance. Such states need to be compensated as a part of the national plan to prevent any adverse mismatch in development of states.

Sensitization to disaster risk is yet a subject hardly addressed in India but awareness is now on the rise. Inclusion of this domain as a subset in all National Security deliberations at various seminars and discussions and educational institutions will go far in giving a culture of better awareness to the nation.

Migration

Migration has an impact on the security interests of individuals, communities, institutions, nations and regions, posing unprecedented political, social, and economic problems. In addition, migratory pressures have become a significant factor in both internal and international politics.

Internal migration has two dimensions; forced and voluntary variety. Forced migration can be a result of internal conflict (Kashmir Pandits in India), economic conditions (labour from poorer states to richer states) and many times natural and manmade disasters. The ongoing pandemic led to forced return of migrant labour to their rural homes creating joblessness. Persistence of such a state could lead to increase in crimes, class conflict and waywardness of an entire society. The rural to urban migration which is mostly a continuous phenomenon in many developing countries impacts two major areas. First, it upsets the urban-rural balance and in particular adversely affects the agricultural sector. This has an effect on food security and therefore the national economy. Keeping the agriculture belts populated through farmer incentives and

assistance to the farm labour through various subsidy schemes is a commitment that governments have to undertake. Any volatility in this can majorly impact availability of food stocks and social harmony. Secondly the increasing human footprint in cities lowers the quality of life and places pressure on urban resources. Increasing density of population leads to higher crime rates, gender issues and neutralizes much of the development executed by urban bodies. From agricultural turbulence to increased crime migration affects many domains.

International migration is usually a result of conflict. Three prime examples can be quoted. The 3 million Afghan refugees nestled on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border evicted due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the Eighties became the core centre for the rise of obscurantist ideology leading to the rise of Islamic radicalism. It has troubled the world for the last 40 years and even the Taliban of Afghanistan was created from this segment. The Rohingyas of Myanmar evicted and displaced to camps in Bangladesh have been in various states of migration far from the conflict zone, including the Indian city of Jammu. Migrants of this type are fodder for terror groups. The four million refugees from the Syrian civil war made their way into Europe through all kinds of routes. The effects of the war travelled deep into Europe carrying all the problems associated with migration; societal tension, religious turbulence, political upheaval and more.

While all the above explains the extent to which migration causes problems of security, in India the issue is most acute in the rural to urban movement and the resultant pressure on the cities. A state like Uttarkhand has few opportunities to meet the aspirations of the people. Entire villages have become bereft of the younger generation and that too close in areas close to the national borders. Central aided schemes to retain youth in these areas and expand the footprint of development through education and small scale industry is considered essential.

India has structures in place to meet the challenges of climate change and has been a cooperative member of the international community in its responsibilities. A National Green Tribunal oversees

various issues concerning the environment. The challenges lie in the field of non-adherence to norms in the field of development which usually clash with the needs for the control of climate change. This has to go beyond the status of every case being decided judicially by creating a culture of awareness right from early education.

The Information Domain

Information covers a large canvas of security and is related to perception, propaganda, disinformation and manipulation. Technologically the cyber domain and social media form a part of this. Before the advent of real mass media through television and print media one of the biggest challenges was the aspect of communication to the public, both own and the adversary's. Information and disinformation are powerful tools of influence which could swing or sway opinion. The coming of social media after mass media has exponentially enhanced the capability of communication to the public in a rapid timeframe. Information in audio-visual and print form is easily disseminated and fake news is the new mantra.

China was one of the first to imbibe the lessons of Gulf War I (1990), the first televised war where CNN entered into drawing rooms, offices, coffee shops and many other public places, thus influencing opinion. It adopted the doctrine of 'war under informationised conditions' in 1993. It developed this further with the proliferating development of the world wide web. By 2003 China came out with its doctrine of 'three warfares strategy'. It is a political and information pre-kinetic warfare strategy employing media or public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare. With the advent of social media many nations are adopting this in a stand-alone mode on a regular basis with or without intent to undertake traditional war.

Separatist organizations within nations and anti-national elements of any kind, including networks such as finance, media, drugs and clandestine weaponry have all benefited from the revolution in social media. Creating disharmony through grey zone operations, political

turbulence and communal antipathy to weaken the fabric of nations, particularly those with diverse nature of populations, has become much easier. As 5G networks come into being this potential for mischief will rise. To protect themselves nations must adopt defensive measures and offensive capability, the latter as deterrence. Most nations have considered this threat as something which requires only guidance of the Armed Forces but not their whole time involvement. The cyber domain has now been added to National Security for good measure. India has different organizations undertaking their own cyber security but a cogent policy and structure to oversee has been added a few years ago. The National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC) is an operational cyber security and e-surveillance agency in India. It is intended to screen communication metadata and co-ordinate the intelligence gathering activities of other agencies. In addition there is the Defence Cyber Agency (DCA), a tri-service organisation of the Indian Armed Forces. Headquartered in New Delhi, the agency is tasked with handling cyber security threats. The DCA draws personnel from all three branches of the Armed Forces. While India has undertaken some nascent steps in the field of cyber security there is yet much to be done in terms of coordination between organisations, institutions and individual ministries which oversee this.

While the cyber domain is receiving attention the information field appears to have yet been neglected without too much conceptual thought to the structures, policy, identification of resources or a single body to handle and run the information domain where its potential use as a weapon is involved. I&B Ministry appears to have the potential to be converted to such a body or to create an authority under it to run and oversee policy. A Strategic Communication Authority composed of members from different fields such as defence, intelligence, police, academia, economics and political (to name just a few), would study the worldwide developments in the field of information as a weapon against the state and society. This body should look at both, the offensive use of information and the means to quell and counter fake information and enemy propaganda.

Trans-National Organised Crime and Economic Warfare

While transnational organized crime is a global threat, its effects are felt locally. UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has recently launched a campaign showing how transnational organized crime destabilizes countries and entire regions, undermines development assistance and increases domestic corruption, extortion, racketeering and violence. The classic example is that of Dawood Ibrahim and his infamous D Company which commenced its operations from smuggling and went on to be exploited by Pakistan to create communal disharmony and turbulence in India's financial capital. The intent was to dent India's national economy by creating an environment of disharmony and insecurity to disallow large scale foreign investments which were lining up as the economy opened in the Nineties; Mumbai was considered the centre of gravity being the financial capital of India. Legitimate government and business operations are the target of such syndicates.

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines economic warfare as – “the use of, or the threat to use, economic means against a country in order to weaken its economy and thereby reduce its political and military power”. We are experiencing this today with China. Fearful of the rise of India, China has mixed economic warfare with military coercion at the border region to intimidate India. Attempts are being made to prevent Indian companies getting ships and even containers for transporting their goods as part of international trade. Cyber, information and covert operations can also be used as instruments for economic warfare, targeting energy networks, supply chains, power grids, tourist facilities, railways and water works. The effect is twofold; first enhanced expenditure to secure all these entities and two, expenditure on the affected ones if targeted. The stock markets and connected financial systems too remained vulnerable.

Realization about economic warfare has not fully penetrated India's security sensitivity although the understanding of economics is highly developed. There is a need for greater academic investigation of this subject especially by various high profile business schools in the

country in conjunction with various strategic think tanks, the National Defence College and the National Security Council.

Education

A nation can achieve national security through the instrument of education. This is believed by all nations to be an instrument for national development and transformation. Education is seen as a veritable means of bringing about socio-cultural, political and economic growth and these foster national security. All over the world, education is viewed as the greatest instrument of change. The achievement of a scientific temper, creation of research and development, development of strategic culture, maintenance of social harmony, an egalitarian outlook and a general environment of national happiness can largely be created by providing the best education to the people. Devoid of such education a nation's international standing, reputation of its people and even its attractiveness as a centre for tourism are all adversely affected. While an adversary may be unable to use this domain as an instrument to weaken a nation it is the nation itself which becomes its own enemy if it does not prioritize education in a comprehensive manner. Education policy needs to be reviewed from time to time due to new developments in science, economics and management. The necessity to create the means to absorb the highly educated has to be kept in mind as otherwise brain drain is the automatic result. Building world class institutions and inviting foreign investment in this field will always help a nation to evolve and enhance its education and human security.

India has some high class educational institutions which must retain the freedom to pursue their work in conjunction with various international institutions. Globalization has flattened the world and best practices are available for incorporation into our model too. National pride, authentic history which promotes social harmony in a diverse nation and the necessity for tolerance and plurality of belief are essential aspects to be included in the curriculum at all levels. The academic community must robustly interact with all other domains especially now that think tank culture has entered India in a fairly big way.

The recent issue regarding education through virtual means during the pandemic related lockdown has generated much debate on thus far unrealized aspects. Discrimination due to non-availability of electronic devices among poorer segments has led to expression of concern. This same concern must be carried forward for more equitable opportunities post the pandemic so that the best talent emerges and discrimination reduces drastically.

Miscellaneous

There are numerous domains which contribute towards non-traditional threats as explained at the outset of this essay. Only a selected few have been analyzed in detail. We may include technology deficit and technology denial, narcotics and contraband, energy security as a subset of economic security, and space among many others. The security of space is going to be one of the more important domains of the future as the world is going to be increasingly dependent on satellite communication and remote sensing for defence, and climate related early warning for disaster management and agriculture needs.

National security in India continues to receive short shrift when it comes to non-traditional domains. Traditional threats involving conventional and sub conventional domains draw all attention because of the issues concerning the border, and internal security related areas such as J&K, the Red Corridor and the North East. It will need a push from the various strategic think tanks, faculties of military training institutions and university departments linked with international relations and defence studies to give non-traditional threats their place in the threat matrix. India can ill afford to live with a truncated understanding of National Security.

***Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM (Retd) is a former 15 Corps commander**