

BOOK REVIEW

How India Manages Its National Security

Authored *by Arvind Gupta*

HOW INDIA MANAGES ITS NATIONAL SECURITY

[This] should ideally become a part of the reading material list of universities, think tanks and national security organs like the police and armed forces.

General N.C. Vij, *former Chief of Army Staff*

ARVIND GUPTA

UNDERSTANDING INDIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

In today's complex and evolving security environment, understanding India's national security architecture is challenging due to the large number of institutions, agencies and mechanisms involved in security governance. In view of this complexity, Arvind Gupta's 'How India Manages its National Security', published by Penguin Random House India Private Limited in 2018, examines the structural development of India's national security, the challenges faced by its security systems, and the author's suggestions for overcoming them.

The author aims to outline India's institutional security framework by adopting a descriptive and institutional approach while evaluating the efficiency of existing institutions. The 12 chapters cover the security environment, armed forces, police, technology, border management, intelligence, diplomacy, cyber security, the National Security Council and other dimensions of national security governance. He begins by establishing the basic structure of the security framework, then moves to each institution or organisation, discussing their structure, functions and their development over time, suggesting measures for building a more efficient and integrated national security framework.

Drawing on institutional analysis and his professional experience, the author consistently conveys a central argument that the effectiveness of national security depends largely on coordinated agencies, strategic thinking, leadership, and adaptation to emerging threats. The author emphasises the role of the National Security Council in integrating security institutions and suggests empowering the National Security Advisor's position beyond a purely advisory role. Chapter 11 on the National Security Council further illustrates this institutional focus. The author identifies the advisory nature of the NSC and its lack of binding decision-making powers as limitations, while discussing the Defence Planning Committee established in 2018 as an effort to strengthen coordination in defence planning.

He also argues that national security cannot be ensured through military strength alone but requires effective governance, institutional coordination and long-term strategic planning. This emphasis on governance and coordination emerges as one of the book's most consistent themes, linking discussions across intelligence, border management, diplomacy, maritime security and other sectors into a single framework.

STRENGTHS OF THE WORK

The book serves as an excellent practical guide for students and beginners with a keen interest in security or defence studies, as it provides an extensive understanding of the hierarchy and functions of each institution. Its comprehensive overview explains complex institutions clearly and connects traditional and non-traditional threats. The use of Indian historical strategic references, such as the Arthashastra and Rajamandala theory, also highlights the relevance of leadership and statecraft in the modern-day world that incorporates governance, development, economy and society alongside military concerns.

LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR REASSESSMENT

In contrast to its strengths, one limitation is that some chapters become descriptive and contain repetitive ideas. Further, since the book was published in 2018, several recommendations and policy discussions have either been established or remain ongoing, making them sound outdated and hence requiring reassessment in light of later developments. A more substantive limitation is the recurring reliance on institutional creation as a solution to coordination or accountability issues, where creating more institutions might contribute to the existing dilemma of multiple and complex institutional structures. The book's discussion of intelligence governance in Chapter 7 examines the tensions between secrecy, surveillance and accountability through examples such as the U.S. National Security Agency surveillance controversy and WikiLeaks. Although these examples effectively raise questions about oversight, their applicability to the Indian institutional context could have been examined more critically given the differences in institutional experiences and public perceptions between the two countries.

SIGNIFICANCE AND RELEVANCE

The book fills an important gap in Indian security literature by bringing diverse institutions, challenges, and governance mechanisms into a single framework. It is particularly useful for students, researchers, policy enthusiasts, and readers seeking an overview of India's security management system.

Beyond describing individual institutions, the book's most significant contribution lies in demonstrating that national security is fundamentally a governance challenge. Across intelligence, border management, maritime security, diplomacy and strategic planning, the author consistently returns to the importance of institutional coordination, leadership and effective policy integration as essential components of national security management. The book therefore provides readers with a coherent understanding of how India's security architecture functions in practice.

I recommend this book to students and scholars beginning their journey in security or defence studies, as well as policymakers and researchers interested in the historical development of security institutions. It is particularly useful for readers interested in governance and security because it simplifies complex security concepts while providing valuable institutional context.

CONCLUSION

Despite certain limitations emerging from the passage of time and evolving security realities, the book remains a valuable contribution to the study of India's national security architecture. Its comprehensive treatment of institutions, emerging threats, and governance challenges makes it a useful resource for understanding India's security management system.

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