

USI Strategic Year Book 2017*

Major General PJS Sandhu (Retd)[®]

USI Strategic Year Book 2017 is the Second Edition of the Year Book since it was started in 2016. In order to dispel the misplaced notion that India lacks 'strategic culture', it is important to visibly articulate our perceptions on strategic issues facing the Country as also to formulate a long term strategic view. The USI Strategic Year Book 2017 fulfils these objectives admirably.

The Book has a collection of 30 well researched essays which have been grouped under five sections. These Sections are: India's Internal Security Dynamics; India's Strategic Neighbourhood; Conflict Spectrum; India's Comprehensive National Power (CNP) and lastly, India's Defence Capability. The essays are authored by eminent persons who are experts in their own fields based on long experience and painstaking research. To that an extent, it is rare to find so much of wisdom and analysis in a single publication. In a review of this nature it is not possible to comment or apply even a broad brush on each of the contents. Hence, I will offer a few general comments so as to give the reader a fair idea of what to expect, from the book.

Section I, dealing with India's Internal Security Dynamics, starts with the lead article 'Revisiting India's National Security Interests and Objectives in the Evolving Geostrategic Milieu'. It is a comprehensive scan of India's geostrategic environment, challenges and the strategy, if India is to realise its dream of being a great power. In fact, this essay sets the direction for the whole book and could even have been a standalone content. So, the essay may be viewed in that context. The other essays in this Section deal with myriad challenges like: 'Hybrid War in J&K', 'Implications of Internal Security Environment and Infrastructure Development in the Northeast on the Defence of Northern Borders with China', 'Radicalisation in South Asia: Implications for India', and 'Modernisation of Police Forces for Effective Management of Internal Security Challenge'. Undoubtedly, all these subjects are important from national security perspective.

The lead essay of the next Section, 'Geopolitics of combating Terrorism in Af-Pak Region' captures the centre of gravity in India's Strategic Neighbourhood. Implications for India have been clearly spelt out. This Section further looks at 'India-Iran-Afghanistan Strategic Engagement', 'Conflict in the Middle East', 'India's Act East Policy', 'Indian Ocean', 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' and world powers like the USA, Russia and China which have a great bearing on the emerging world order and India's place in the order of things.

Section III, dealing with 'Conflict Spectrum' is of great relevance from the point of view of national security. This Section contains essays on 'Collusive and Hybrid Threats in the Indian Context'; 'China's Strategic Stakes and Growing Footprint in Pok'; 'India's Nuclear Neighbourhood' and lastly, the 'Non-linear Strategic Frontiers' dealing with Cyber Space, Outer Space and Information Space. All in all, this Section gives a very good idea of things to come and how India needs to be prepared for the challenges and opportunities.

Section IV, dealing with India's CNP is really the heart of the Book. It is the biggest section having ten essays on varied aspects of national power. As the lead article of this Section suggests, it is a reality check of where India stands, the direction and the distance it needs to travel to achieve what India aspires to be. The essay comparing economies of China and India

is particularly revealing. The author avers, any slowdown in China's growth would impose on the global economy, which in turn is likely to influence the Indian economy too. Similarly, the essay on 'India's Sustainable Economic Growth' is a good reality check and shows the long distance that we need to travel to achieve a modicum of standards to be considered a developed society. The essays dealing with 'Energy Security', 'Digital Transformation', 'Technological Empowerment', 'Make in India', 'UN Peace Keeping Operations', and finally 'Integration and Synergy in India's Instruments of National Power' complete the mosaic of India's road to the building of CNP. At the end of it, one cannot help feeling that there is a long distance to be travelled before we rest!

The last Section deals with 'India's Defence capability'. The four essays cover: 'A New Approach to Indian Military's Force Structuring', 'Role of Ballistic Missile Defence in India's Strategic Deterrence', 'Building Jointmanship in the Armed Forces', and lastly, 'Reforms for Optimisation of Defence Spending'. All these essays are futuristic in nature and bring home the point – what all needs to be done.

A few suggestions come to mind. It is quite natural in a work of this nature for some repetition to creep in which distracts a reader. For future editions, the editors may like to prune down the total number of articles which would help in retaining focus and avoid repetition to an extent. Further, a lead article setting out the direction of the Book may be considered. Also, if editors can add major takeaways at the end of each section, that would be of great help to the reader.

Overall, the Book is a treasure house of knowledge and analysis which would be extremely useful for researchers and to create general awareness on strategic issues facing the Country. The Book would also be useful for professional education of armed forces officers, especially those preparing for various promotion and competitive examinations.

*USI Strategic Year Book 2017, (Vij Books India Pvt Ltd), pp. 215, Price Rs 1495/-, ISBN: 978-93-86457-14-1.

®Major General PJS Sandhu (Retd) was commissioned into 8th Light Cavalry on 15 June 1966 and later commanded 47 Armoured Regiment. He retired from the Army as Chief of Staff, 1 Corps on 31 July 2003. He served as Deputy Director and Editor of USI from 01 May 2007 to 31 Dec 2016.

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CXLVII, No. 609, July-September 2017.