

## Documented National Security Strategy A Need of the Hour

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### Introduction

In Nov 2023, media reports revealed that India has commenced the process of formulating a National Security Strategy (NSS) after extensive deliberations by the military and strategic community. The National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) is currently compiling inputs from various central ministries and departments to create the draft, awaiting final cabinet approval. The specific timeline for the strategy's completion remains uncertain, though multiple ministries have already submitted their inputs to the NSCS.[\[1\]](#)

An NSS is a comprehensive framework formulated by a sovereign country to protect its core interests, in the face of evolving challenges. It serves as a guiding plan for a nation's security, defence, and foreign policy, offering policymakers objectives and methodologies to achieve national goals. Regular updates are essential for the NSS to address both traditional and non-traditional threats, holding stakeholders accountable for their roles.

Despite previous attempts, India lacks a written NSS or even a National Security Doctrine. Existing military and nuclear strategies, along with the outdated Raksha Mantri's Operational Directive of 2009, currently fulfil this purpose. The NSS, needs to stem from a doctrine and transforms into an executable policy. While a doctrine provides principles and beliefs guiding decision-makers, a strategy structures execution for goal achievement and a policy offers principles guiding decision-making and action.

While doctrines are more permanent than strategies, they must also remain flexible to cater for changing paradigms and major conceptual shifts. Doctrines must also be reviewed periodically to ensure that they remain relevant and do not become dogmas. And with every update in doctrine, the strategy must also be reviewed.[\[2\]](#) With this in view, the need for a written document seems essential.

### The Indian Constitution and its Linkages to National Security

The Indian Constitution serves as a foundational document outlining the principles and structure of the state. While primarily addressing legal and governance frameworks, it substantially influences the NSS. Guaranteeing fundamental rights and duties, the Constitution requires the NSS to protect citizens' rights within constitutional bounds. It also includes directive principles guiding state policy for a socio-economically just and reasonable national security framework. The allocation of powers between the centre and states necessitates shared federal efforts in areas like border security and disaster management. Emergency provisions for war or armed rebellion outlined in the Constitution should be considered by the NSS, ensuring a balance between the national security imperatives and democratic principles.

### Elements of NSS

The creation of such a document would entail a comprehensive geo-spatial, geo-demographic and geo-political scan to bring out the current state of the country and the world along with alternate futures that could pose themselves. There will be a requirement for a wider consultation with experts and ministries, diverse inputs, and a need to predict the future and examine potential scenarios. National Security is a multifaceted domain and rather than addressing only military threats it would include the following components:

- Strategic deterrence.
- Territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- Counterterrorism and internal security.
- Diplomacy and international relations.
- Economic security.
- Maritime security.
- Human security.
- Cybersecurity.
- Strategic infrastructure development.
- Technology and innovation.
- Climate.
- Agriculture.
- Food security.
- Cyber security.
- Resilience and disaster management.
- Public awareness and civil-military cooperation.
- Multilateral engagement and governance.
- Nuclear policy and non-proliferation.
- Strategic planning and adaptability.
- Ethical and legal framework.

### **Potential Benefits of the National Security Strategy in India?**

A written NSS is crucial for India's national security, offering a strategic approach to navigate the complex global security landscape. It guides military and defence reforms, providing a holistic view of national security threats and a path for addressing them. To cover a wide range of challenges, including non-traditional ones a written NSS is considered essential for strategic planning. Some other benefits could be:

- Comprehensive approach.
- Strategic vision.
- Deterrence.
- Clear objectives.
- Policy and decision-making guidance.
- Crisis management.

- Resource allocation.
- Prioritisation.
- Public awareness and confidence.
- International engagement.
- Coordination and integration.
- Adaptability to changing threats.
- Whole-of-The Nation's Approach.

### **The Choice of Publicising the NSS**

NSS will be a very sensitive document and it is likely that there could be political hesitation to put the contents in the public domain. Also taking ownership of such a strategy will be daunting and the thought could go against publicising it. The decision to make the NSS of India publicly available will be a complex and nuanced one and hence the following pros and cons should be considered:

#### **Considerations for Publicising the NSS.**

- It facilitates communication of the government's vision and priorities.
- Enhances transparency, thus permitting clarity to citizens on the nation's security priorities and strategies.
- Can serve as a deterrent, showcasing the nation's capabilities and determination.
- Foster awareness and engagement among citizens, encouraging a sense of shared responsibility for national security.
- It holds the government accountable to the public by offering insight into its security decision making process.
- It helps build public confidence in the government's ability to handle security challenges.
- Helps in shaping public perception and understanding of security threats and challenges.
- Allows experts, think tanks, and academia to contribute valuable insights, enhancing the overall capacity to address security challenges.

#### **Considerations against Publicising the NSS.**

- Could impede safeguards thus leaking classified information compromising national security.
- Could reveal sensitive information to the international community.
- Could provide adversaries with insights that could be exploited.

- Could have a risk of misinterpretation or miscommunication of complex security strategies by the public.
- Certain nuanced aspects of the NSS may pose challenges for the public to fully comprehend.
- Adapting to changing security scenarios may require adjustments to strategies, which could be challenging.

Keeping in mind the issues discussed above, the publication of a written NSS does seem like a must and the need of the hour. To mitigate the confidentiality issues, there could be two versions of the document: one for public consumption and as a signal to external stakeholders/adversaries of our intentions and methodologies. The other would be a classified version for the various security agencies to act upon. Hence, striking a balance between transparency and safeguarding classified details thus stands out as most crucial and having the two volumes would take care of all such concerns.

A written NSS would provide a clear and comprehensive framework for national security policies, objectives, and priorities. It would enhance transparency, aid in communication, and serve as a reference point for all stakeholders. In addition, a written NSS can facilitate better coordination among various agencies, enhance accountability and contribute to long-term strategic planning.

### **Challenges**

The creation of a written document spelling out the country's NSS is a very mammoth and herculean task fraught with numerous challenges.<sup>[3]</sup> Governments have been hesitant to put the NSS in writing, mainly because of concerns about obligation traps, potential criticism, or rigidity in decision-making. The compliance of NSS with existing legal frameworks, including international agreements and domestic laws, could pose challenges. Assigning the resources assets which are limited, to implement the NSS amidst competing budgetary demands could also be difficult. The bureaucratic differences within the Ministry of Defence and other government agencies and the military may face diverging opinions and hinder effective coordination and cooperation among various stakeholders.

The rapid high-tech developments in the fields of artificial intelligence, space, biotechnology, and cyber security presents a challenge in keeping the NSS updated and relevant. Adapting the NSS to address current security threats, such as cyber threats, terrorism, and other non-traditional security issues, remains a persistent challenge. Addressing internal security issues, such as insurgency, terrorism, and communal tensions would also add to the complexities. Managing nuclear deterrence and ensuring a credible nuclear strategy requires careful consideration.

India's reactive methods to address security challenges contrast with the preferred proactive approach. Building a national security culture that emphasises the importance of a NSS and systematic thinking about security has been a gradual process, due to lack of national will.

### **Conclusion**

The NSS would also examine the current shortfalls in India's capability and suggest measures to strengthen the essential elements of national power. Weaknesses in capabilities will leave the nation with an inability to convert the vision into reality. As the strategy is pursued, the nation

could be faced with unexpected challenges. However, if the basic tenets are followed, progress is assured.[4]

In conclusion, the imperative for a documented NSS for India is clear and compelling. It serves as a foundational framework to address diverse security challenges, safeguard the nation's interests, navigate a complex security landscape, and contribute to regional and global stability. The drafting and effective implementation of such a strategy are crucial steps in ensuring India's security and prosperity in the 21st century. However, the path towards a strong NSS is not without hurdles. Political consensus, resource deficits, and the need for continuous modification to dynamic global changes pose substantial challenges that need to be met.

## Endnotes

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[1] India to bring in a National Security Strategy: what is it, why is it important, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-to-bring-in-a-national-security-strategy-what-is-it-why-is-it-important-9014489/>

[1] Expert Explains: What is a National Security Strategy and why India must have one, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/expert-explains-national-security-strategy-9016083/>

[3] India's National Security Strategy, <https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/india-s-national-security-strategy>

[4] India's National Security Strategy, [https://manifesto.inc.in/pdf/national\\_security\\_strategy\\_gen\\_hooda.pdf](https://manifesto.inc.in/pdf/national_security_strategy_gen_hooda.pdf)

**Maj Gen Sanjeev Chowdhry (Retd)** is a veteran with over 37 years of commissioned service. A graduate of the DSSC Wellington, and College of Defence Management during his career, the General officer has served in all types of terrain and environment while on command, staff, and instructional duties. He specialises in the subject of Net Assessment and is presently the Director Editorial at the USI.

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