

**National Security Paper
USI Monograph—9-2025
Whole-of-Government Approach to
National Security**



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About the Monograph

The monograph presents a comprehensive analysis of India's evolving national security paradigm. It underscores the shift from a military-centric view to a holistic, multidimensional approach encompassing economic resilience, cyber capability, environmental sustainability, and socio-political stability. It highlights the necessity of a whole-of-government strategy to manage hybrid threats, technological disruptions, and regional instability. India's strategic thought has evolved through historical eras—from ancient texts like *Arthashastra* to post-independence doctrines shaped by wars, reforms, and modern challenges. The monograph critiques structural deficiencies, inter-agency rivalries, and the absence of a formal national security strategy. Case studies such as the 1962 and 1971 wars and Operation Parakram, illustrate the critical need for synergy between political, military, and diplomatic actors. The final chapters recommend institutional reforms, strategic communications, cyber preparedness, and a formalised national security doctrine to ensure India's preparedness for future conflicts and safeguard its rising global stature.

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Introduction

Wars are fought by nations and executed by the military as one of the components of national power. The diplomatic, economic, and political dimensions shape the conditions drawing confidence from the military dimension. A strong political will is a fallout of the confidence and trust in the nation's armed forces.

In an age of multi-domain warfare, India's national security architecture has recently demonstrated the strength of jointness and strategic foresight during Operation (Op) Sindoor, which was initiated on 07 May 2025, in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack, and showcased a calibrated, tri-Services response that embodied precision, professionalism, and purpose.

Op Sindoor, a tri-Services joint operation, successfully achieved its military objectives in under four days. A key highlight of the operation was the clear articulation of both national and military objectives, complemented by seamless coordination among the Services and effective civil-military integration. Op Sindoor was a jointly planned and synergistically executed operation, wherein, the core strengths of the three Services were individually applied towards attaining the common overall military objective.¹

The above underscores that India's national security is anchored not just in military strength but in the seamless integration of political will, strategic foresight, and joint operational capability. The example of Op Sindoor illustrates how multi-domain warfare demands synergised responses, combining the strengths of all three Services with civil-military coordination. It highlights

that a confident and decisive political leadership draws strength from a capable and cohesive armed force, reinforcing that jointness, clarity of objectives, and inter-agency collaboration are critical pillars of India's evolving national security architecture.

Defining National Security

In today's geopolitical context, labelling something as a matter of 'National Security' automatically elevates its importance. Of course, not everyone agrees on which issues meet all the parameters of national security, and as a result, its definition has fluctuated over time without ever being precisely established. For many, national security is narrowly perceived through the lens of military power and conventional warfare. It today extends far beyond military concerns, encompassing economic, socio-political, energy, cyber, environmental, and human development dimensions. From traditional territorial threats and hard power to climate change, ransomware, critical minerals, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and social media, the scope of national security has significantly widened—propelled by economic globalisation and rapid technological change. While new threats continue to emerge, legacy challenges remain, making expansion rather than contraction the norm in national security discourse.

Problems regarding India's territorial threats that have not been resolved are like dormant volcanoes, where no one can predict the next eruption. Such urgent national security priorities result not only in demanding attention but also resources.

But if everything is defined as a matter of national security, then everything becomes a priority. This creates the risk of spreading resources too thin and falling into a pattern of trying to do everything, ultimately undermining the ability to focus on actual priorities.

Qualifying Concerns of National Security

In theory, national security should be easy to define. For a country, any threat that directly, or even indirectly, challenges the sovereignty or territorial integrity constitutes a valid national security concern. Powerful and inimical foreign militaries undoubtedly impinge on national security, but so do other threats, including internal security challenges that may be homegrown or externally abetted. A steady expansion of qualifying concerns includes energy security, food security, nuclear proliferation, drug trafficking, terrorism, cyberattacks, protection of citizens abroad, and foreign markets, among many others. In fact, COVID-19 even added pandemic protection to the list. Threats to infrastructure, energy supplies, medical supplies, and vulnerable economic infrastructure can also pose national security concerns, as can climate change.

But when terms such as national security are popularised, they may mean different things to different people. Militaries used to focus only on the threats from land, sea, and air, but in this century, cyberspace and space have become complex terrains of conflict. In fact, it is the multi-domain threat that is uppermost. AI and quantum computing are now critical technologies and, therefore, a national security priority. The list of ‘Critical Minerals’ continues to expand, as climate change and the transition from fossil fuels generate due to its soft stance.

insatiable global demand for rare earth metals needed for batteries and other clean energy applications.

Technological innovation and the advent of new kinds of weapons poses another challenge in managing national security priorities. The proliferation of nuclear and ballistic missile technologies, along with drone warfare, necessitates a careful assessment of the risks posed by India's neighbours. Furthermore, as barriers to acquiring weapons of mass destruction continue to decline, even non-state actors can emerge as significant threats.

With the advent of new technologies, certain resources become critical, while previously vital ones often lose their significance. A century ago, coal and fossil fuel factored into how states prosecuted wars; today, it is cobalt and lithium that are labelled critical minerals, and now a new threat is emerging from water, much of it from lack of it.² New technologies also multiply the number of pathways that rivals can use to threaten national security. Information and communication technologies can empower the military and serve as powerful tools for propaganda, but they can also be used for disinformation. Similarly, breakthroughs in biosciences can save lives on the battlefield but also heighten the risk of biological warfare.

Shifting Threats

Looking at national security in the Indian context, the threat perception has shifted from Pakistan to China and, thereafter, back to both Pakistan and China collectively. There is also a shift from being cautious to being more proactive. The defensive strategy not only reflected a passive attitude in India's national security approach but also exposed New Delhi's perceived weakness due to its soft stance. In contrast, Pakistan

adopted an offensive approach, utilising unconventional warfare tactics. This asymmetry undermined the effectiveness of India's security strategy in dealing with Pakistan, as New Delhi remained defensive while Islamabad took an assertive stance. The change now demonstrates a new India.³

Today, war is difficult to define. Combat is no longer confined to the traditional domains but is steadily expanding to newer domains such as cyber, space, the electromagnetic spectrum, and the digital space. Furthermore, with the expanding scope of the national security canvas, the armed forces alone are not equipped to address all emerging challenges and threats; hence, it is now imperative to adopt a whole-of-government approach to national security.

Defining Whole-of-Government Approach

A 'Whole-of-Government' approach to national security involves multiple government departments, both military and civilian, working across boundaries, ensuring coordination and cooperation to achieve shared goals, and an integrated government response in security-related matters.

This approach to national and global security considers both national security and its associated challenges and threats in a comprehensive manner. This holistic approach to national security must be developed and implemented, if India is to meet today's challenges comprehensively.

Relevance of Whole-of-Government Approach

To protect the country from the threats and challenges to national security in an increasingly complex and dynamic strategic environment, the demand for inter-agency collaboration has grown. This has now been identified as a prime necessity to achieve an adequate level of national security.

The national security structure needs to operate as a system rather than a collection of separate components. A whole-of-government approach to planning, programming, and budgeting national security is a concept that establishes a unified effort between inter-governmental agencies to maximise all available resources in a collaborative effort.

Addressing new security challenges is less about an objective of dominance and more about predicting, preventing, and managing disruptions, such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorist acts, global contagions, and natural disasters. This has led to the call for a whole-of-government approach to national security.⁴

In 2002, the first post-9/11 United States (US) National Security Strategy (NSS) shifted the focus of how national security policy was implemented, including international development for the first time as an essential component. Since then, every NSS has noted the importance of 3Ds (Defence, Diplomacy, and Development) and whole-of-government approach to national security. The 2015 US NSS noted, “The challenges we face require... the pursuit of a comprehensive agenda that draws on all elements of our national strength”.⁵

Indian Context

For India, it is not merely the availability of a whole-of-government approach that is critical, but the effective and While the presence of well-equipped and capable defence forces is essential, it is the strategic resolve and the readiness to deploy, when necessary, that ultimately defines the robustness of a nation's national security posture.

This National Security Paper argues that a whole-of-government approach is essential for India to effectively respond to evolving national security challenges across domains.

Chapter 1

Evolution of Indian Strategic Thought

Evolution of Indian Strategic Thought: Pre-Independence

Foundations of Indian Statecraft. The fountainhead of Indian thought on statecraft can be traced back to the Vedic times when the Kings had no standing armies. Indian spiritual-philosophic traditions can be described in different ages, dating back to the Harappan civilisation. A basic tenet of ancient Indian political thought across the different ages was the belief that the king must regard himself not as the creator of law but only as its guardian.

Vedic Age. As per the Rig Veda—the earliest surviving work of literature dating from approximately 4000 to 2000 BCE—each tribe during this period was headed by a leader known as a *Raja* (King). The *Raja* was neither regarded as divine nor considered an absolute monarch. Two tribal assemblies, one a small council of the great men of the tribe and the other a larger gathering of the heads of families, approved his accession to office and advised him on important matters. The democratic principles taking root in India can be traced to this period.

Brahmanical Age. The Brahmanical Age (2000 to 1000 BCE) is associated with rituals and certain religious practices to control the population through their religious interpretations. The ‘Art of War’ started developing from this period onwards.

Upanishadic Age. The third period, known as the Upanishadic Age (1500 to 500 BCE), was a significant era during which the Vedanta was composed. This body of work offered a psychological interpretation of the *Sambitas* (compilations of hymns) and was explicitly critical of the belief that performing religious rituals alone could lead to spiritual liberation. There was a change in the mental mode during this period, when the ‘Age of Intuition’ started giving way to the ‘Age of Reason’.

Epic Age. During the fourth period, which was the Epic Age (500 to 200 BCE), the great epics, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and its sub-epic, the *Bhagavad Gita*, were composed. The *Mahabharata* contains passages that dwell on the warrior’s joy of battle as they fight for glory and war-booty. The epics encompass the full range of human emotions and behaviours, and serve as historical accounts of their time, offering insights into the political order, statecraft, and nature of warfare during that era. In Kurukshetra, the two supreme Commanders met and framed the ‘Rules of Ethical Conduct’ for conducting *Dharmayuddha* (Righteous War)—for an 18-day war of great death and destruction.⁶ Yet, all the participants broke the rules of *dharma* (righteousness), and twisted it to suit their ends. However, ‘The concept of dharma and of fighting only righteous wars’ remained in the Indian psyche for centuries thereafter.

Classical Age. The Classical Age refers to the period when much of the Indian subcontinent was reunited under the Gupta Empire. This period is called the ‘Golden Age’ of India and was marked by extensive achievements in science, technology, engineering, art, dialect, literature, logic, mathematics, astronomy, religion, and philosophy that crystallised the elements of what is generally known as Hindu culture.

During this age, Jainism and Buddhism originated. The Mauryas created the first model of national unity. Ashoka was considered a peaceful and moral leader who, after defeating the Kalingas in an extremely bloody battle, was so appalled that he gave up war and later preached non-violence. This is the period when Chanakya wrote his treatise *Arthshashtra*, which is considered as the central text to interpret independent India's strategic culture as well as foreign policy.

Late Classical Age. The Late Classical Age in India began after the end of the Gupta Empire and the collapse of the empire of Harsha in 7th Century CE. This marked both the rise and fall of the Kannauj Kingdom, the Chalukya Dynasty, the Chola regime, and the Delhi Sultanate. Following the Gupta period, a succession of powerful dynasties and empires emerged, often challenged by lesser Indian rulers who engaged in continuous conflict over land and power—until the arrival of the Mughals in the 16th Century. The development of statecraft and art of war during this period is well documented.

Medieval India. The period between the late classical age and the British *Raj* (Rule) is termed as medieval India. This period marked the onset of foreign invasions, beginning with the Mughals and followed by European powers. While these foreign rulers imposed imperial control over India, they also introduced a degree of political unification across the subcontinent. While the armies transformed, the period was characterised by fighting local conflicts and consolidating power for the rulers. In only a few instances were foreign invaders from the northwest stopped or defeated before they entered Indian soil. It was only Maharaja Ranjit Singh who appreciated the need for a forward strategy and invaded Afghanistan. As a result, India was compelled to be

on the defensive on Indian soil after the invaders had gained access to the rich North Indian plains. It was only during the British period when the armies of India were involved in overseas campaigns with the aim of securing British interests, be it in China or during the two World Wars. Till then, the furthest the armies had gone was Afghanistan, Tibet, and Myanmar, with the exception being the expansion of India under the Chola Dynasty towards South East Asia.⁷

Modern Age. This age begins with British rule in India, which is generally considered to have commenced with the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and continues to the present day. The British rule provided India with a geopolitical frame of reference which continues to influence India's present strategy. On land and at sea, India sought to protect its territorial integrity and deny other powers access to it. In his book *India's Battlefields: From Kurukshetra to Balakot*, Colonel Ajay Singh states, "Indian warriors were individually skilful and invariably very brave and courageous but military leaders neglected the organisational structure of their armies. They did not adapt to new concepts of warfare and often remained rooted in the past. Nor did they embrace technology. They were always too busy battling each other instead of the outsider. And that was the cause of their defeat and for the centuries of subjugation that followed".⁸

India had been invaded from the northwest over the centuries, from lands untouched by the seas. This led to a strong strategic land-oriented defence posture toward the northwest, which has persisted over the years.

Strategic Thoughts: Post-Independence

1947-1960s.

- India's strategic thought process was heavily influenced by its colonial past and the struggle for independence. The immediate priorities were nation-building, economic development, and securing territorial integrity. India adopted a policy of non-alignment, refusing to align itself with any major power bloc during the Cold War.⁹ This policy aimed at maintaining sovereignty and independence in foreign affairs. The emphasis was on state-led internal development including economic development through centralised planning, known as the 'Mixed Economy' model, which included state ownership of key industries and a focus on import substitution industrialisation.
- As per Shiv Kunal Verma, military historian, when General Sir Rob Lochart went to Jawaharlal Nehru with a defence paper that needed a policy directive, he was told, "Our policy remains *ahimsa* (non-violence); we see no military threats. As far as I am concerned, you can scrap the army. The police are good enough".¹⁰ The army was, however, drawn into the war in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in Oct 1947, where it demonstrated remarkable resilience, courage, and innovative tactics—such as moving tanks of the 7 LIGHT CAVALRY to Zoji La and the occupation of Leh. However, it did not advance towards Skardu, and the border has remained unresolved since 1948. Nehru veered away from building military power, though when cornered was not averse to using it.¹¹ cases in point.

There was also a deep-seated paranoia about a military coup.¹²

1960-1970.

- India faced security challenges, including wars with China and Pakistan. The war with China shattered India's confidence. India's diplomatic and intelligence apparatus had misread the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) hostile intents in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. These conflicts reinforced the importance of maintaining a strong defence and achieving self-sufficiency in defence production. The set-back in 1962 can be attributed largely on the neglect of the armed forces and political interference. Whereas, in 1965, Indian resilience at the tactical level prevailed over Pakistan, the absence of operational art resulted in a strategic stalemate. The wars were fought over territorial and sovereignty issues that are deep-rooted and highly emotive, making negotiated resolution difficult over the years.
- Despite the non-aligned stance, India developed closer ties, first with the US and then the Soviet Union, particularly in defence and economic cooperation. The 'Green Revolution' was also initiated in the 1960s to boost agricultural productivity and food security, addressing a key strategic concern.

1970-1980.

- The 1971 Indo-Pak War resulted in the creation of Bangladesh and further solidified India's strategic posture in the region. However, India was outmanoeuvred during the Simla Agreement (1972) and, as a result, failed to translate its decisive military victory into a strategic gain. As per General VN Sharma (former Chief of the Army Staff), one of the 'Great Lessons' from the Indo-Pak war in 1971 is that fighting a war is not just a military affair, but a 'Total Affair' that includes politics and diplomacy.¹³ He emphasised that war was not merely a military endeavour but a comprehensive national effort that seamlessly integrates various government departments and agencies.
- Soon after the war, which used manoeuvre and *blitzkrieg* (an intense military campaign intended to bring about a swift victory) in the Eastern Theatre, General TN Raina, MVC, ordered a monumental study headed by Lieutenant General (later General) KV Krishna Rao, along with Major General (later General) K Sunderji and Major General (later Lieutenant General) ML Chibberm, to research, study, and recommend the management of India's military security till the turn of the century. The study aimed to think through clearly on how to better prepare the army for future wars.¹⁴ Restructuring of formations, mechanisation, raisings, and relocation of formations were issues deliberated upon in detail and formed the basis for procurements and modernisation.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and subsequent US support for Pakistan had implications for India's strategic calculus, leading to concerns about regional stability and security. Though the period was marked by economic stagnation, the security landscape in the subcontinent evolved rapidly as Pakistan was being armed by the US, who then leveraged that capability against India. When General Zia-ul-Haq decided to harm India 'With a thousand cuts', the US chose to look the other way.¹⁵

- What stood out during this time was a decisive action of occupying the Siachen glacier against all odds. It was during this period that General Sunderji, having attended the Army Command and General Staff Course at Fort Leavenworth in the US, having been exposed to the US Air Land Battle Doctrine (FM 100-5), saw an opportunity to challenge India's traditionally stagnant military mindset, which had long remained more comfortable with attrition than with manoeuvre. This change to an offensive mindset was inculcated through a series of exercises which culminated in Exercise Brasstacks. This was soon followed up by a quick mobilisation to counter the Chinese designs in Sumdorong Chu during Op Falcon.

This was also the period when India saw the emergence of a robust maritime strategy taking shape which owed its origin to the manner in which the Indian Navy acquitted itself in the 1971 conflict. Building on the impetus of that conflict, the Indian Air Force also saw itself emerging as an independent arm of war fighting.

- Also, during this period, India was drawn into a proxy war in J&K, and engaged in countering terrorism in Punjab—marked by Op Bluestar, the scars of which still remain—as well as in the North East. India had also deployed troops as part of Op Pawan in Sri Lanka and carried out Op Cactus in the Maldives. But proactively leveraging the transformed military capability of the armed forces to pursue foreign policy goals had mixed results and since then, India has only deployed forces overseas under the United Nations (UN) mandate.

1990-2000.

- Narasimha Rao's 1991 Budget ushered in economic reforms.¹⁶ The reforms, often referred to as the 'New Economic Policy', aimed at liberalising the economy, dismantling many of the protectionist measures, and opening up to foreign investment and trade. This marked a significant shift in India's strategic thought process, and had implications for India's defence and security strategies, as greater economic strength was seen as essential for maintaining a credible defence posture and addressing security challenges. However, the end of the Cold War saw the emergence of a fragmented world dotted with numerous localised but seemingly intractable conflicts arising from differences of religion and ethnicity. In recent times, these limited conflicts have become the war and hybrid threats.

The nuclear tests conducted by India in 1998 marked a significant milestone in its strategic evolution, underscoring its nuclear capabilities and shaping its nuclear doctrine based on ‘Credible Minimum Deterrence’.

- The tide turned during Op Vijay, when India successfully evicted Pakistani troops who had infiltrated and occupied un-held areas in Kargil, Drass, and Batalik Sectors. The war was intense, albeit geographically limited. However, the political decision to refrain from crossing the Line of Control once again reflected a defensive mindset, ultimately to India’s strategic disadvantage.
- Op Parakram witnessed the largest-ever mobilisation following the attack on the Indian Parliament, showcasing India’s ability to respond decisively to Pakistani aggression. However, it revealed significant weaknesses in the mobilisation process, thereby, closing the window of opportunity for executing any offensive operations. The pulling back of 2 Corps and removal of the then-Corps Commander once again exhibited a reluctance to go on an offensive. Though Op Parakram failed to achieve its objective—partly due to the inability to prosecute a limited war under a nuclear backdrop—it led to the formulation of the ‘Cold Start’ or ‘Proactive Doctrine’. Op Parakram also highlighted the inability

2000-2023.

- India's strategic thought continued to prioritise strategic partnerships with major powers while also increasing its engagement with multilateral institutions. Security challenges persisted, including terrorism, border disputes, and regional instability. India faced heightened tensions with Pakistan, particularly following terrorist incidents such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the 2019 Pulwama attack. While India was praised for its 'Strategic Restraint' in eschewing war, a critical question remains: Was this response purely a matter of choice, or was it also shaped by the lack of usable military options?
- The 'Act East Policy' was launched in 2014 with the aim of strengthening India's ties with Southeast Asian countries and enhancing its strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific region. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 also had significant socio-economic implications, leading to disruptions in economic activities, healthcare challenges, and the need for rapid policy responses to mitigate the impact. Economic diplomacy became paramount, fostering regional integration and connectivity.
- Geopolitical tensions, particularly with China, escalated following the border clashes in 2020, leading to increased scrutiny of India's strategic posture and defence preparedness. While there is no doubt about the way India stood-up to China's expansionism and aggression in Ladakh, the country soon reverted to a

defensive mindset by reorienting and rebalancing its forces, particularly the strike formations against Pakistan.

- India also prioritised cybersecurity, technological advancements, and self-reliance while advocating for climate change mitigation. Throughout, India upheld the principles of sovereignty and strategic autonomy, actively engaging with the global community to safeguard its interests.
- The surgical strikes conducted by India in 2015, in Myanmar, and thereafter in Pakistan, in 2016, post the attack in Uri and in 2019, in response to Pulwama, signalled to Pakistan that New Delhi would undertake suitable punitive actions.¹⁷ The initiative has been reaffirmed by India in 2025 during Op Sindoor.
- Over the time, India has developed a set of policies and strategies to deal with the complex strategic dilemmas facing the country, relating to both internal threats which are fuelled by the neighbours as well as the potential of external threats.

Some general characteristics and objectives of Indian strategy emerge from the above evolution. India has developed a predominantly defensive strategic orientation. Its large ground forces remained largely defensive and protective. Although there were periods when India sought a more offensively oriented strategy, such as Exercise Brasstacks and more lately the surgical strikes, but these were exceptions to the overall defensive orientation.

- India's military orientation remains largely land-oriented, with the army getting the largest share of the resources, followed by the air force. The navy,

which was first employed in 1971, has gradually developed blue water and sea-denial capabilities, but it is looking at greater power-projection capability.

- India maintains a long-term and unwavering commitment to strategic independence and autonomy in its decision-making and military capabilities, although economic, industrial, and technological shortcomings—along with budgetary constraints—will continue to pose limitations. However, there is also a school of thought which says that India has kept missing the opportunity to leverage its tactical and operational successes into long-term strategic gains. There is no doubt that performance of conventional forces depends largely on the synergy between the political leadership and armed forces.

- To quote Arjun Subramaniam, former Air Force officer and military historian, in *Full Spectrum*, India's emergence as a potential global power will be dictated not only by its economic rise and exercise of soft power but also by its calibrated exploitation of force as a visible and potent tool of statecraft. India has continued to build its military capability primarily for deterrence and protection of its interests rather than power projection.¹⁸

Shift from Traditional Military-Centric Approaches to Comprehensive Approaches in the 21st Century

Redefining National Power Calculus. National power is no longer only military prowess, but also economic resilience, technological prowess, political stability-cum-diplomatic acumen, and soft power capabilities.¹⁹ The digital age has elevated the importance of cyberspace and cognitive space as a domain of power. Moreover, the ability to harness innovation, foster education, and project cultural influence has become integral to a nation's standing in the global arena.²⁰ The following are key components that constitute national power in the contemporary era:

- **Military Power.** Traditional military strength remains the principal component of national power. This includes the size and capability of a nation's armed forces, technological advancements in defence systems, its deterrence, and doctrines.
- **India's Nuclear Doctrine and Deterrence Policy.** On 17 Aug 1999, the then-Indian National Security Advisor (NSA) Brajesh Mishra released a Draft Nuclear Doctrine, which was then further refined by the Cabinet Committee on Security in Jan 2003. Protecting the Indian State from the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons by any state or entity was the *raison d'être* of India's nuclear deterrence policy.²¹ The fundamental purpose of the country's nuclear weapons was that they were meant only for self-defence. India will not be the first to initiate a nuclear strike but will respond with punitive retaliation should deterrence fail.

The main features of India's nuclear doctrine are as follows:

- Building and maintaining a credible minimum deterrent.
- A 'No First Use' posture; nuclear weapons to be used only 'In retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian Forces anywhere'.²²
- Nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be 'Massive' and designed to inflict 'Unacceptable Damage'.
- Nuclear retaliatory attacks to be authorised only by civilian political leadership through the Nuclear Command Authority.
- Non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states.
- India to retain option of retaliating with nuclear weapons in the event of a major attack against it with biological or chemical weapons.
- Continuance of strict controls on export of nuclear and missile-related materials and technologies, participation in Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty negotiations, continued moratorium on testing.
- Continued commitment to the goal of a nuclear weapon-free world through global, verifiable, and non-discriminatory disarmament.

Economic Power. Economic strength is a critical pillar of national power. A robust economy provides the resources necessary for military capabilities, infrastructure development, and social programmes. Key indicators include Gross Domestic Product (GDP), per capita income, industrial capacity, innovation, and economic diversification.²³

Technological Power. With globalisation and the technology boom, a new term ‘Geotechnologies’ has emerged which has become a tool of strategic competition and power play. At the centre of this contest is technology, a driver for economic, political, diplomatic, and military power.²⁴ In the 21st Century, technological prowess is a critical element of national power. Nations that lead in Research and Development (R&D), innovation, and the application of cutting-edge technologies gain a strategic advantage. The key challenges remain fiscal funding on technology R&D and complementary human resource development, which in India’s case remains subpar.

Soft Power. Soft power represents a nation’s ability to influence others through cultural, educational, and diplomatic means rather than coercion. It includes the appeal of a country’s political values, cultural exports, educational institutions, and international diplomatic influence.

Information Power. Control and manipulation of information through perception management has become integral to national power. Countries that excel in information warfare, perception influence, and strategic communication can shape narratives, influence public opinion, and gain an advantage in the global information landscape.

Diplomatic Power. Diplomatic influence involves a nation's ability to build alliances, negotiate favourable agreements, and navigate international relations effectively. Skilled diplomacy enhances a country's standing in the global community and promotes its national interests.

Energy Security. The ability to secure a stable and diverse energy supply is crucial for national power. Countries that possess diverse and sustainable energy sources reduce vulnerability to external disruptions and geopolitical tensions.

Environmental Sustainability. Recognition of the importance of environmental sustainability contributes to a nation's soft power capacity and long-term stability. Addressing environmental concerns and adopting sustainable practices enhance a country's reputation and resilience.

Human and Resource Capital. The quality of a nation's workforce, education system, and healthcare infrastructure are vital components of national power. A skilled, healthy, and innovative population contributes to economic productivity and technological advancement. Similarly, resource crunch, be it financial budgeting or commodity provision, impacts the national security calculus.

Resilience and Adaptability. Nations that can effectively adapt to changing circumstances and withstand shocks, whether economic, environmental, or geopolitical, exhibit a form of power in their resilience. This includes the ability to recover from crises and navigate uncertainties.²⁵ Overall, the 21st Century presents a dynamic and intricate security landscape, demanding nations to adjust and redefine their national security approaches. The convergence of the language of war and peace,

the evolving facets of national power, and the manifold threats necessitate a comprehensive and flexible NSS.

Chapter 2

Geopolitical Scan 2025: Strategic Implications for India

India's Strategic Posture Amidst a Shifting Geopolitical Order

The world today is amid a transition towards challenged multipolarity and, herein, India with its strong military power, growing economic, and diplomatic heft has emerged as an important player. However, the strategic environment in which India must navigate its national interests is marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. 2024 can aptly be referred to as a year of extraordinary geopolitical conflict and the resurgence of great power competition, marked by a significant churn in domestic politics as over 50 per cent of the global population participated in elections. The year was marked by the continuing constancy of conflict.

The seven recent strategic shocks, namely, the COVID pandemic, Galwan standoff, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Ukraine war, the Gaza conflict, Indo-Pak conflict of 2025, and Israel-Iran standoff have determined the great-power contestation in a post-Cold War world. Historical animosities, conflicting core interests, presence of volatile flashpoints, dangerous military posturing amid deepening strategic mistrust, and a weakening UN Security Council heighten the risk to global peace. The present geopolitical developments point towards continued hostility:

- The wars reflect the evolving nature and character of warfare, where the lines between declared and undeclared conflicts are increasingly blurred, thereby, compounding security dilemmas. Furthermore, the induction of niche and disruptive technology has become a catalyst to asymmetric warfare altering the very dynamics of deterrence and use of force. Swarm drone and missile attacks are dominating conflicts and have become the order of the day.
- The Ukraine conflict has forced countries across Europe and elsewhere to increase their defence budgets and review force structures. Forward military posturing and dangerous manoeuvres as seen in the Baltics, South China Sea, and Taiwan Strait, carry the risks of intentional or accidental flare-ups.
- The regional conflicts in West Asia are now pitting Israel and the US against Iran and its proxies. An 'Axis of Resurgence' versus an 'Axis of Resistance'.²⁶ This has resulted in significant escalatory risks as also the resurgence of global terrorism.
- Political and diplomatic challenges in India's neighbourhood, mainly in Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, in addition to China and Pakistan present significant regional challenges to Indian National Security.

It is in this context that nuclear disarmament and force reduction treaties stand abrogated, leading to their re-emergence in geopolitical and strategic calculations. This is illustrated by Pakistan's doctrine of full-spectrum deterrence covering a range from zero to 3,000 kms, China's ongoing review of its nuclear doctrine and expansion of its arsenal, North Korea's nuclear sabre-rattling, and, finally, the potential for an Armageddon in West Asia arising from hostilities between two undeclared nuclear powers—Israel and Iran.

The evolving geopolitical scenario, therefore, demands a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the strategic environment and its impact on India's strategic interests and posture.

Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as the centre of gravity of global powershift. At the heart of Indo-Pacific geopolitics lies the issue whether China can become the predominant power in Asia, thereby, upstaging the US.²⁷ The US vision of the Indo-Pacific has many convergences with similar visions enunciated by Japan and some European countries. The US has security treaty alliances with Japan, South Korea, Philippines, and Australia. The NSS of the US advocates integrated and extended deterrence in the Indo-Pacific to counterbalance China.

In addition, post-2014, Russia has embraced its 'Pivot to Asia' policy, aiming to enhance trade with the thriving economies of Asia, beyond just China. One significant prong of this policy is the development of resource-rich Far East, operationalisation of northern sea routes, and development of the second Trans-Siberian pipeline to China. The second notable prong is the connectivity with India through International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC),

Vladivostok-Chennai transit corridor, and the planned Caspian Railway line.

One of the major limiting factors for India's outreach is its direct geographical connectivity to the region. Establishing a working relationship with Taliban in Afghanistan, engagement with Iran (despite US economic sanctions), and fast-paced operationalisation of INSTC (including Chahbahar) are the strategic imperatives for India, along with an emphasis on regional groupings and maintaining a strong Indo-Russian alliance.

Indian Ocean Region and India's Neighbours

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), an important stakeholder in the region propounds a neutral outlook that seeks to keep the region out of any military confrontation. India, apart from being member of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), seeks to develop closer relations with maritime democracies of the region as part of its external balancing. The biggest challenge for India is to balance the great power rivalry being played out in the Indo-Pacific. New Delhi portrays itself as a strategic bridge between Eurasia and Indo-Pacific. To play an important role in this region, India will have to assume a leadership role in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) to become a preferred net security provider for the IOR littorals.

India's neighbours, barring Bhutan, have joined China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Likewise, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives are signatories to China's Maritime Silk Route passing through the IOR. China's major transit corridors such as China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China-Nepal Economic Corridor, and China-Myanmar development of

about 22 dual-use infrastructure projects in the IOR could potentially swing the regional balance of power to China's favour.

Geopolitical dynamics in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia are unfavourably poised towards India. Troubled Pakistan's chronic hostility, Talibanisation of Afghanistan, consequences of US economic sanctions on Iran, the latter's proclivity towards China, and the Red Dragon's economic sway in Central Asia impinge on India's 'Connect Central Asia Policy'.

Bangladesh has recently seen a collapse of democratic institutions and the flight of its leader Sheikh Hasina to India. Beijing's influence in terms of trade, arms sale, and infrastructure development in Bangladesh is significant, since in the absence of viable oppositions, the Islamists whose interests are inimical to India fill the vacuum in collaboration with Pakistan. The rise of anti-India and anti-Hindu factions, such as the Jamat-e-Islami, poses a direct threat to India's influence in the region. This political instability in Bangladesh could further embolden anti-India forces, weakening the traditionally friendly ties between the two nations.²⁸

The present regime in the Maldives is pro-China, and herein, Indian strategic diplomacy would demand patience and engagement with the political classes and public at large, who are inclined towards India. There are, however, green shoots appearing in India's relationship with the present regime in Maldives.

Sri Lanka's strategic location has long placed it at the focal point of the competition between New Delhi and Beijing. Amid economic crisis in Sri Lanka, Indian aid worth USD 4.0 bn not only worked in the country's crisis management but also swung public opinion towards India vis-à-vis China, evident from the moratorium imposed on foreign ships (mainly Chinese). However, the results of the recent elections pose new challenges to India. Under Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Colombo may tilt further towards China, emboldening Beijing's influence in the region. His rise, rooted in Marxist ideology, brings a new dimension to India's already complex regional relations. It signals a potential shift in Sri Lanka's foreign policy that could deepen China's influence in the Indian Ocean, a region critical to India's strategic and economic interests. Historically, Dissanayake has expressed anti-India sentiments, and his past, combined with his inclination towards China, adds to India's concerns.²⁹ The unresolved grievances of Sri Lanka's Tamil community add another layer of concern. Bharat has a stake in ensuring that their rights and dignity are upheld. How Dissanayake addresses this sensitive issue will shape India's response, demanding careful diplomatic handling.

Pakistan's obsession with India and its continued use of proxies as an instrument of state policy was evident during the 22 Apr 2025 terror attack on tourists in Pahalgam. In response, India launched Op Sindoor. The Indian Armed Forces successfully executed their assigned tasks with precision and professionalism. Operations were conducted in a deliberate and discreet manner, aligned with national objectives.

As per Lieutenant General Rajiv Ghai, the then-Director General of Military Operations, said, “Op Sindoor was conceptualised with a clear military aim to punish the perpetrators and planners of terror and to destroy their terror infrastructure. The Prime Minister (PM) in his address to the nation on 11 May 2025 clearly articulated that Op Sindoor has carved out a new benchmark in India’s fight against terrorism and has set up a new normal”.³⁰ He also stated, “India will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail. India will strike precisely and decisively at terrorist hideouts developing under the cover of nuclear blackmail”.³¹

China’s forward deployment along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and obduracy in maintaining the status quo in Depsang, Chumar, and Demchok in Eastern Ladakh have seriously undermined the prospects of any thaw in Sino-India relations in the foreseeable future.³² Moreover, considerable strategic military capacity gap exists between both, particularly in the domain of disruptive technologies, such as rocket force, information support force, anti-ship ballistic missile, anti-ship cruise missile, nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, AI, swarm drones, Electronic Warfare (EW), cyber, space, and counter-space capabilities. Further, pulling out resources from the western borders and their deployment on the LAC has created certain voids in India’s offensive capabilities’ vis-à-vis Pakistan.

For India, managing these simultaneous regional challenges will require deft diplomacy. Balancing relations with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan while countering China’s strategic advances demands a renewed focus on South Asia. As these nations navigate their internal political turmoil, India must act decisively to preserve its influence and safeguard its interests in the region.

Internal Security Challenges

India remains beset with internal security challenges that are linked with external security threats. India needs to work assiduously to improve the state of security in the states bordering Pakistan and China. Islamabad continues to foment trouble in J&K and Punjab, and that cannot not be underestimated. The entire terrorist ecosystem in Pakistan remains intact, visible in reviving militancy in South of 'Pir Panjal' ranges and Kashmir Valley. Regarding Ladakh, the region's strategic importance vis-à-vis collusive threat from China and Pakistan needs no emphasis.

As per Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reports, 18 districts across seven states are categorised as left-wing extremism affected, where the sporadic incidents of sensational ambushes by the Maoists continue.³³

In the Northeast, ethnic strife in Manipur on one hand and the lingering issue of Naga Framework Agreement on the other hampers sustainable peace in the region, thus, derailing India's Act East Policy. The challenge is further compounded by China's creeping assertiveness on the McMahon line and Myanmar being in the throes of civil war.

Security of the Siliguri corridor, India's jugular vein to four countries and eight states, is impacted by China's strategic forays in Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. China continues investment in critical infrastructure projects in Nepal. Of critical strategic importance is the influence in Eastern Nepal (bordering Darjeeling and West Sikkim) and three-step boundary negotiations with Bhutan. Any concessions on the Doklam plateau in Western Bhutan and/or China's presence in

Illam/Jhapa or Terai region carry implications for the security of the Siliguri Corridor.³⁴

With rapid modern advancement, another important geopolitical driver is the competition over niche and disruptive technologies such as AI, 5G/6G, cyber, big data analytics, blockchains, robotics, lethal autonomous weapon systems, hypervelocity vehicles, quantum communications, space, and counter-space technologies. It needs to be recognised that India still is a technology dependent country with low scientific temper, R&D base, and industry. Technological development of the nation and its armed forces should be accorded top most priority.

The Indian government clearly has its plate full. This is not the time for rhetoric such as, ‘We will fight with what we have’, ‘There will be no war’, ‘India is a peaceful nation’, or ‘Our deterrence is in place’. The regional environment is very unpredictable and, therefore, this is a time for the whole-of-government approach to strengthen national security. Only then will India’s deterrence be credible.

Chapter 3

India's Comprehensive Risk Assessment

Evolving Dimensions of National Security

Since the beginning of the third decade of the 21st Century, the world has been witnessing a watershed defined by the rapidly changing geostrategic environment. The envelope of conflicts has been constantly expanding in both intensity and magnitude.

In the complex landscape of the 21st Century, the definition of national security has evolved beyond traditional boundaries. As countries become more interconnected and threats transcend borders across diverse domains, national security is no longer defined solely by military strength. It now demands a comprehensive understanding of economic stability, cybersecurity, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, and more.

The threats emanating from scarce resources and non-traditional aspects like water, energy, health, education, environment, and technology to a nation add another dimension.³⁵ Issues such as climate change, water control, food security, and economic stability have broadened the context of national security. That there will be new threats and challenges is inevitable.

India's security environment faces a wide variety of traditional and transnational challenges. As a large nation with both land and sea borders, the security sector must balance many threats vying for attention and resources.

In addition, the traditional and transnational threats overlap in many ways.

In the Indian context, the government first had to combat COVID-19 and was subsequently confronted with the Galwan crisis involving China, leading to a rebalancing of forces through increased physical deployment of troops in Eastern Ladakh. The global security environment has been shaped by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, between India and Pakistan, and between Israel and Iran. This has been coupled with the increasing Chinese expansionism and aggressiveness, both in the Indo-Pacific as well as on the northern borders in the Himalayas. The external environment is today characterised by conflicts, prolonged global economic downturn, and consequential increasing tension around regional hot spots.

Coupled with this, there has been no let-up in Pakistan-sponsored terrorist attacks in J&K. The latest being the terrible terror attack at Pahalgam, following which India struck a firm blow to Pakistan during Op Sindoor for their continued support to terrorism. As stated above, the PM in his address, thereafter, spoke of a change in India's doctrine and strategic resolve.

Hybrid warfare, both by state and non-state actors, is an omnipresent reality.³⁶ Religious fundamentalism is playing out in this space. Spheres like connectivity projects such as the CPEC and BRI, technological choices, medical research, data protection, security, and intellectual property rights adherence—all have strategic implications. Quest for resources is leading to spheres of influence and strategic regions.

Shiv Shankar Menon, former Foreign Secretary of India, while delivering the Air Chief Marshal PC Lal Memorial Lecture in 2012, stated, “Our definition of security has gradually expanded over time—from the defence of our territory to include providing the necessities for our existence and growth, such as energy and water, and to larger issues of global and regional security. We now speak of traditional and non-traditional security challenges”.³⁷ While speaking at the India Today Conclave in Apr 2024, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) stated, “At a time when the world is witnessing two major wars, India has its own set of external challenges to deal with”.³⁸ General Anil Chauhan, highlighted the rise of China, the unsettled boundary issue, and Beijing’s ‘Friendship’ with Pakistan as the biggest challenges before Indian Armed Forces. Both neighbours profess a friendship ‘As high as the Himalayas and as deep as the oceans’ and are nuclear-capable. But while these challenges are predictable, he said the real challenge lies in the unpredictability of evolving warfare.

Traditional Security Threats

Hard security—comprising external defence and internal security as traditionally defined—remains core and constitutes an essential condition for India to transform itself, and pursue prosperity and opportunity for its citizens. This is true, no matter how new challenges and technology may have changed the tests that face us.³⁹

The traditional concept of security envisages the use of military means to deal with the threats to the territorial integrity, unity, and sovereignty of a state. There is no doubt that India requires both a peaceful periphery and a supportive external environment to enable its transformation.

India has been faced with a tense security environment since its Independence. To the west, poor relations with Pakistan have led to multiple wars and intermittent skirmishes over the decades. India's land borders have been its historical fault line. Bharat has fought four wars with Pakistan which were mainly due to J&K. At the same time, it has also fought a war with China in 1962, apart from frequent borders standoffs, the most-recent being in Galwan in May 2020. Unfortunately, none of these wars have guaranteed peace. India needs to augment its military capabilities rapidly to counter the twin threats on its borders.

Pakistan and China continue to be prominent external threats, despite India reaching out to its hostile neighbours several times. In Pakistan's case, the line between internal and external threats is blurred as Islamabad continues its proxy war by exporting terrorism to destabilise India, especially in J&K. Therefore, eliminating terrorism in J&K is more important to deal a body blow to Pakistan's sinister designs, as it may not be able to fight another war with India due to its economic mess.

Post Pahalgam, India's change in strategic resolve was demonstrated by launching Op Sindoor. The operation carried out for little over 72 hours and demonstrated India's evolution in war-fighting capabilities and execution. While the aim was to avenge Pahalgam, the purpose was to send the right message to Pakistan that there is zero tolerance to terrorism, and that an act of terror will be constituted and treated as an act of war. India

also shifted to targeting the backers of terrorism from merely terrorists.

India's biggest threat is China with its increasing territorial ambitions ranging from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh. China today can be termed as a superpower, and its aggressive behaviour and expansionism as well as increasing collusively with Pakistan is a matter of serious concern.

The case of China's border transgressions into India is another matter of concern. China has a grand strategy, arguably one of the strongest in recent times and contesting the US for world domination as its grand plan. In this plan, border clashes with India are tactical expressions. For the moment, as Samir Saran, geopolitical analyst argues, "China wants a multipolar world but a unipolar Asia".⁴⁰

Over the next few decades, it aims to rule the world by weaponising all ways and means it has at its disposal, including the economy, telecommunications, technology, and critical materials, apart from ever expanding defence forces.

China has been a supporter of Pakistan's conventional arsenal since the 1960s and the country's most important defence partner since the end of the Cold War. Over the past decade, China has become Pakistan's leading and most important provider of arms, and Pakistan has become China's largest and most important recipient of the same, acquiring almost 40 per cent of Beijing's exports.⁴¹

Beijing and Islamabad have a multi-dimensional relationship despite differing beliefs, along with social and political differences. China has supported Pakistan economically, militarily, and politically, while Pakistan remains its only diplomatic partner that has consistently backed it in all

international forums. It is in the common interest of both countries to contain India. There exists collusion between China and Pakistan regarding India's land borders, and it is believed that future conflicts will continue to arise due to India's unresolved fault lines, despite India's consistent efforts to avoid confrontation.

There is emerging collusivity in the maritime domain with the development of Gwadar and growing commonality in naval equipment. Pakistan's strong politico-military ties with China also seek to counterbalance India's influence in the region. The collusivity represents itself in across multiple domains, development of infrastructure to include road, air, and ports inter-operability due to commonality of equipment, training, sharing of intelligence, missile, and nuclear technology. In addition, the dependence on China in the fields of cyber, EW, space, and access to new technologies including disruptive technologies, dual-use technologies, and AI will only get solidified.

The sea has no borders and there are many users of this medium. Contemporary India's maritime security has traditionally been threatened on account of Pakistan and China, and the related activities of their maritime entities. Against this backdrop, two security scenarios could possibly emerge for India. The first would be on account of Pakistan's 'Concept of Operations' in the Arabian Sea, duly supported—overtly or covertly—by China. The other could manifest itself when an increasingly high technology-enabled Chinese Naval Force and China's other maritime assets signal an unambiguously proactive intent within the IOR, with the potential to adversely impact India's economic and security interests.⁴²

‘Pakistan released its first ever Maritime Doctrine, entitled *Preserving Freedom of Seas*, in Dec 2018⁴³, wherein, it considers the North Arabian Sea as its primary area of interest, and the broader Western Indian Ocean as its extension. This doctrine assesses that the “Nuclearisation of Indian Ocean by the adversary (read India) has raised stakes in the region ...”. The Pakistan Navy (PN), in order to ensure suitable deterrence against this supposed enemy’s intent, advocates an “Approach of provocative and flexible mobility using sea space...”. The PN approach also includes “Hit first with maximum or minimum application of force”. Pakistan’s maritime doctrine advocates the use of submarines to cause “High-intensity diversion and disruption of enemy’s Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs)... to dominate the war theatre”.⁴⁴ The role envisioned for the Chinese Navy as “Conducting international cooperation in distant waters”, first articulated in its *Defence White Paper* of 2008, had by 2015 progressively expanded to include “Protecting its strategic SLOCs and overseas interests”. Towards this latter objective, China has been prioritising the high technology-driven development of its naval hardware and revising its operational plans. Its accelerated pace of warship-building continues to provide numerical superiority and capacity accretion to the PLA Navy.⁴⁵

In the Indian Ocean, China has violated almost all provisions of UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and has a threatening presence in the IOR. With its investment in Bangladesh and the collapse of the Sheikh Hasina’s government, the freedom of manoeuvre India enjoyed in the Bay of Bengal is likely to be restricted. This is more so after the change of government in Sri Lanka. India’s Island territories

need to be better defended in view of the increasing Pakistan-China nexus in the Indian Ocean.

Nuclear Threats

The India, Pakistan and China border is the only place on earth where three nuclear-armed states have recently engaged in violent confrontations along their contested borders. Two of these states are closely aligned against India, and, as a result, India faces a nuclear challenge both from its Western and Northern neighbours.

Non-Traditional Security Threats

In the 21st Century, true security is not only a matter of defending against military threats but also addressing the root causes of instability, such as poverty, inequality, and climate change. It requires a holistic approach that recognises the interdependence of nations and the shared responsibility to build a more secure and prosperous world.⁴⁶

In recent years, the debate has moved on to discuss a broader concept of security, which envisages threats to an individual and to a community, besides dealing with threats to state. This is a liberalist view of security, the non-traditional view, in which an individual's right to freedom from fear is emphasised.

According to Mely Caballero-Anthony, Professor of International Relations, non-traditional security threats may be defined as “Challenges to the survival and well-being of peoples and states that arise primarily out of non-military sources, such as climate change, cross-border environmental degradation and resource depletion, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, food shortages, human

smuggling, drug trafficking, and other forms of trans-national crime".⁴⁷

Non-State Actors. The rise of non-state actors, including terrorist organisations and transnational criminal networks, challenges the conventional understanding of security threats. Their ability to operate across borders and exploit technological advancements requires adaptive strategies, emphasising intelligence cooperation, targeted counter-terrorism efforts, and international collaboration.

Religious Radicalism. Religious extremism poses a multifaceted challenge to global security, necessitating a nuanced and comprehensive approach to counteract its influence. This phenomenon goes beyond mere acts of terrorism, extending to the propagation of radical ideologies that undermine principles of peace and coexistence. Countering religious extremism and ideological threats demands a comprehensive and collaborative approach that extends beyond immediate security measures.

Energy Security. Energy diversification is critical, as traditional reliance on fossil fuels poses both environmental and security risks. Investing in renewable energy contributes to environmental sustainability and enhances energy security, reducing vulnerabilities to supply chain disruptions and geopolitical fallouts.

Resource Depletion. Resource crunch, be it water, energy, food, or any other essential commodity, is a critical aspect, as a nation heavily dependent on external sources may face vulnerabilities and geopolitical risks. This is now also with regards to rare earths.

Healthcare. Global health challenges, exemplified by pandemics, showcase the intrinsic link between public health and national security. Robust healthcare systems, international cooperation on disease surveillance, and timely response mechanisms are vital components of a comprehensive NSS. Cyber space is emerging as the new arena for contest and competition amongst states. Information warfare, cyber terrorism, cybercrime, and cyber fraud are emerging as new areas of concern.

Social Cohesion. Myriad internal threats and challenges to social cohesion pose significant hurdles to the nation's harmonious development and internal security. Persistent issues such as religious and caste-based tensions, religious radicalisation, economic disparities, and regional imbalances contribute to social fragmentation.

Chapter 4

Key Components of Making India Secure

Towards a Secure and Resilient India

As one of the largest democracies and a rapidly developing economy, India stands at a crucial juncture in its pursuit of national security. The complexities of regional dynamics, economic challenges, technological advancements, and evolving threats necessitate a multifaceted approach to ensure a secure and prosperous future. This discourse delves into the key components of making India secure, including socio-political stability, economic prosperity in a sustainable environment, technological prowess, strengthening defence capabilities, and the importance of various national institutions.

Socio-Political Stability

Governance and Institutional Integrity. Socio-political stability is the cornerstone of national security. Effective governance fosters public trust, transparency, and accountability, which are essential for maintaining social cohesion. India's democratic framework, while resilient, grapples with issues such as political polarisation, corruption, and regional disparities. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to reforming governance structures, ensuring that institutions operate efficiently and transparently. Strengthening democratic institutions—such as the Judiciary, Election Commission, and anti-corruption agencies—can help mitigate

the risk of political instability.

Inclusivity and Social Cohesion. For India to achieve security, it is vital that its diverse population feels included in the national narrative. Policies aimed at social justice addressing caste, gender, and economic inequalities are crucial. India is home to a multitude of ethnicities, languages, and religions; recognising and celebrating this diversity is essential for national unity. Promoting inclusivity through targeted policies such as affirmative action, equitable access to education, and healthcare can reduce societal tensions. For instance, enhancing educational opportunities for marginalised communities can empower individuals and contribute to social stability. Additionally, ensuring equal representation in political and economic spheres fosters a sense of belonging and ownership among citizens.⁴⁸

Community Engagement. Local governance structures, such as Panchayati Raj institutions, can be empowered to enhance community engagement. Involving citizens in decision-making processes fosters ownership and accountability crucial for conflict resolution. Moreover, involving local populations in development projects can improve the effectiveness of these initiatives. When communities actively participate in the planning and execution of projects, they are more likely to align with local needs and priorities, leading to sustainable outcomes. This grassroot approach can also build resilience against potential conflicts and unrest.

Resilience Against Extremism. Combating extremist ideologies is critical for national security. Education, dialogue, and community outreach are essential tools in this endeavour. Fostering an environment where diverse views can coexist is crucial in preventing radicalisation. Engaging youth in constructive activities such as skill development programs, cultural exchanges, and sports can empower students. Governments, non-governmental organisations, and civil society must collaborate to create platforms for interfaith dialogue, promoting understanding and tolerance among different communities.

Economic Prosperity in a Sustainable Environment

Sustainable Development Goals. Economic security is intrinsically linked to environmental sustainability. India must align its economic policies with sustainable development goals to ensure that growth does not come at the expense of natural resources. Transitioning to a sustainable economy involves investing in renewable energy sources—such as solar, wind, and hydropower—to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and mitigate climate change affects. By reducing reliance on fossil fuels, India can improve energy security while addressing climate change. Additionally, sustainable agricultural practices, such as organic farming and agroforestry, can enhance food security and protect biodiversity.⁴⁹

Job Creation and Entrepreneurship. Encouraging entrepreneurship, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, can tap local talent and innovations. Creating job opportunities is crucial for economic stability and security. The government can play a pivotal role by providing access to capital, mentoring, and infrastructure support for start-ups. Additionally, promoting

vocational training and skill development aligned with industry needs can bridge the skills gap in the workforce. Investing in sectors such as technology, healthcare, and renewable energy can spur job creation while addressing pressing national challenges.

Infrastructure Development and Trade. Robust infrastructure is vital for economic prosperity and security. Investment in transport, logistics, and digital infrastructure can enhance connectivity, stimulate economic activities, and ensure efficient resource allocation. This, in turn, strengthens national security by facilitating rapid response capabilities during emergencies.

Balancing Trade and Security. Furthermore, engaging in global trade while protecting domestic industries is also essential for economic resilience. India should actively negotiate trade agreements that favour its economic interests while ensuring the protection of sensitive sectors. Diversifying trade relationships can also reduce dependency on any single market. Strengthening ties with regional partners, particularly in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific, can enhance economic security and stability. India's participation in multilateral trade organisations can further bolster its position as a global economic player, promoting stability through economic interdependence.

Technological Prowess

Space Technology and National Security. When focusing on India's technological prowess, the first thing that comes to mind is space exploration and cybersecurity. India's advancements in space technology have profound implications for national security. The Indian Space Research Organisation has made significant strides in satellite technology, which

enhances capabilities in communications, surveillance, and navigation.⁵⁰ This technological prowess is vital for both civilian and military applications. In the case of defence security, the deployment of satellites for reconnaissance and disaster management can enhance India's strategic capabilities. Additionally, collaboration with other nations in space exploration can strengthen diplomatic ties and promote knowledge sharing.

Strengthening Cybersecurity Infrastructure. With the accelerating digitalisation, cybersecurity has become paramount. To secure the nation, it is must to invest in building robust cyber defences to protect critical infrastructure from cyber threats. This includes developing a skilled workforce in cybersecurity and fostering collaboration between government, private sector, and academia. Implementing comprehensive cybersecurity policies and frameworks can mitigate risks associated with cyber-threats. Regular training programs and awareness campaigns can also ensure that individuals and organisations remain vigilant against potential threats.

Harnessing AI and Disruptive Technologies. Another modern advancement and need of present day is incorporation of AI. Embracing AI and other disruptive technologies can transform various sectors, including healthcare, education, and agriculture. India has the potential to leverage these technologies for economic growth and social development. However, ethical considerations and regulatory frameworks are essential to prevent misuse and ensure that these technologies benefit society at large. Establishing innovation hubs and fostering public-private partnerships can stimulate technological advancements that benefit national security.

Driving Innovation Through R&D and Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). R&D is also vital for driving innovation and enhancing national security. By investing in cutting-edge research, India can develop homegrown technologies that address specific security challenges. Promoting STEM education at all levels can create a skilled workforce equipped to tackle future challenges. Furthermore, providing incentives for start-ups focused on technology development can drive economic growth while enhancing national security.

Pursuing Foreign Policy Goals in a Challenging World

Strategic Partnerships and Regional Cooperation. In an increasingly multipolar world, forging strategic partnerships is essential for enhancing national security. India should focus on strengthening its relationships with key global players, enhancing its influence while ensuring mutual security. Initiatives like the QUAD demonstrate the potential for collaborative security mechanisms. Engaging with regional organisations, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the ASEAN, can enhance India's regional standing and foster stability through cooperation. Diplomatic efforts should emphasise shared security interests and collaborative approaches to regional challenges.

Attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for Economic Security. Attracting FDI is critical for economic growth and stability. By creating a favourable investment climate through regulatory reforms and initiatives, India can draw in foreign capital that contributes to infrastructure development and job

creation. Ensuring a transparent and predictable investment environment is essential to build investor confidence. By fostering innovation and enhancing competitiveness, India can position itself as a global investment destination.

Development Aid and Cultural Diplomacy. India can also utilise development aid strategically and enhance its influence in neighbouring regions. By investing in development projects in countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, India can foster goodwill and stability in its immediate neighbourhood. This approach not only enhances regional cooperation but also reinforces India's role as a responsible regional power. India can further strengthen its international standing through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and humanitarian assistance. By promoting its rich cultural heritage and fostering people-to-people connections, India can build bridges and enhance its influence on the global stage.⁵¹

Global Governance and Institutional Reform. India should also advocate for reforms in international institutions to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. By pursuing a more prominent role in global governance, it can contribute to international peace and security while advancing its national interests. Active participation in international organisations, such as the UN and the World Trade Organization, allows India to shape global norms and standards. By championing issues like climate change, counter-terrorism, and sustainable development, India can enhance its global standing and influence security dynamics.

Strengthening Defence in Multiple Dimensions

Comprehensive Defence Strategy. A secure India requires a multi-dimensional defence strategy that counters both conventional and unconventional threats. This includes preparing for hybrid warfare, counter-terrorism, and cyber threats, while also ensuring readiness for traditional military engagements. Developing a comprehensive defence policy that addresses these diverse challenges is essential. This policy should prioritise intelligence gathering, surveillance, and reconnaissance to identify and mitigate potential threats proactively.

Modernisation and Readiness. Investing in modernisation futuristic programs for the armed forces is crucial for maintaining operational readiness. This includes upgrading technology, improving logistics, and enhancing training programs to ensure that India's military remains capable and responsive to contemporary threats.

Global Defence Partnerships. It can facilitate technology transfer and foster indigenous production capabilities. By investing in R&D, India can enhance its defence manufacturing sector, promoting self-reliance in critical areas.

Self-Reliant Defence Production. Promoting indigenous defence production through initiatives like 'Make in India' can enhance self-reliance. This reduces dependency on foreign arms. The emphasis should also be on collaboration with private sector players and start-ups leading to innovations in defence technologies.

Defence R&D Ecosystem. Creating a conducive environment for defence R&D, including financial incentives and streamlined regulations, can foster a vibrant defence industry. This approach not only enhances national security but also stimulates economic growth. Overall, the focus must be on substance, not optics.

Other National Institutes of Importance.

Institutes of Higher Education. Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in shaping a secure future. By emphasising research, innovation, and interdisciplinary studies, universities can produce skilled graduates who contribute to national security in various fields, including technology, public policy, and social sciences. Investing in higher education can enhance India's human capital, enabling the country to compete at the global level. Collaboration between universities and industry can foster innovation and address the skill's gap in the workforce.

Role of the Private Sector. The private sector is a key partner in national security. Engaging businesses in security initiatives, ranging from cybersecurity to disaster management, can leverage private expertise and resources for public good. Public-private partnerships can enhance the effectiveness of security measures and promote resilience. This is apart from defence manufacturing and research.

National Cadet Corps (NCC). Institutions like the NCC play a vital role in instilling values of discipline, leadership, and national service among youth. By promoting military training and community service, the NCC can contribute to a sense of responsibility and patriotism among young citizens. Engaging youth in activities that promote physical fitness, leadership,

and teamwork can foster a generation that is prepared to face challenges. The NCC can also serve as a platform for youth to engage in community development initiatives, reinforcing their commitment to national security.

Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs). Strengthening the capabilities of CAPFs is vital for maintaining internal security. Investments in training, technology, and community policing can enhance their effectiveness in combating crime, and maintaining law and order. Implementing community-oriented policing strategies can build trust between law enforcement agencies and communities. By promoting transparency and accountability, police forces can enhance their legitimacy and effectiveness in ensuring public safety.⁵²

Research Institutions and Think Tanks. Think tanks and research institutions contribute to policy formulation and national security discourse. By providing evidence-based research and fostering dialogue, they can help shape strategic decisions and public policy. Encouraging collaboration between think tanks, government agencies, and academic institutions can facilitate knowledge sharing and innovation. By addressing emerging security challenges through research, India can enhance its policy responses and strategies.

Chapter 5

Case Studies

To highlight the need for a whole-of-government approach to national security, there are many examples that could be used. The following case studies have been chosen, which highlight the nuances very succinctly:

From Defeat to Victory. The contrasting cases of the 1962 and 1971 wars. Whilst India suffered a humiliating defeat in 1962 against China, in the short span of eight to nine years, the Indian Armed Forces won a glorious victory against Pakistan, resulting in the creation of independent Bangladesh.

Op Parakram. The terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament on 13 Dec 2001 sent shock waves across India and resulted in the largest mobilisation of the armed forces under Op Parakram, which should have led to an offensive against Pakistan, but did not, despite many highs and lows. At the end of this year-long mobilisation, many were left wondering as to who had gained more, India or Pakistan.

Op Sindoor. This operation exemplifies the successful application of a whole-of-government approach in safeguarding national security. Integrating military precision with diplomatic outreach, intelligence coordination, and civil administration, the operation neutralised threats while maintaining strategic stability. It demonstrated how inter-ministerial synergy—across defence, external affairs, home affairs, and information agencies—can achieve both tactical

success and long-term resilience. Op Sindoor, thus, serves as a model for multi-agency response in complex security environments.

These case studies illustrate how important it is to have a whole-of-government approach to national security and how its absence can lead to self-defeating conclusions.

Case Study 1: 1962 Indo-China Conflict: A faulty Approach to National Security

While the genesis of the Indo-China dispute on the border is rooted in history, India's dismal performance in the conflict of 1962 was a result of the faulty approach to the national security adopted by the Government of India post-Independence.

Shiv Kunal Verma, in his book *1962: The War that Wasn't*, writes, "In the early part of 1949, China was not a player as far as India's national security was concerned. The only threat envisaged was from Pakistan, and Nehru airily talked of doing away with an army, claiming that the police was good enough to govern the country and handle external threats".^{53 54}

The approach to national security was ad-hoc and dominated by PM Nehru, with every other key player dwarfed by his towering personality; the only exception being the then-Home Minister Sardar Patel, who unfortunately did not live long enough to shape India's approach to national security. Sardar Patel's letter dated 07 Nov 1950 to the PM, in which he warned of communist China's expansionist mind set, did spur Nehru to set up two committees to examine the Chinese threat along the 4,000-km-long Indo-China frontier.⁵⁵ Both the reports were remarkable and warned the government clearly of the looming Chinese threat. However, in the absence of a

formalised approach, both reports were brushed aside by the prevailing lobby.

When India became independent on 15 Aug 1947, there was hardly any strategic expertise in the senior hierarchy, both civil and military. Under Nehru's vision, India was projecting itself as a state without any military ambitions, the emphasis being on curtailing the defence expenditure and limiting the strength of the armed forces, which had no relationship with the security needs of the country.⁵⁶

In such a strategic vacuum, each power player was left to draw their own conclusions, often at cross purposes to each other and detrimental to India's national interests. A few of such issues are examined to highlight the effect of this uncoordinated approach to national security.

When China marched into Tibet in Oct 1950, India did not have any cohesive policy to confront the Chinese. While individuals like the then-Intelligence Bureau Chief BN Mullik advocated a hardliner, this was neither backed by the political establishment nor even by the Indian Army. Though Sardar Patel's letter of 07 Nov 1950 to the PM led to the setting up of two committees. However, their recommendations were soon junked.

There is a saying: "War is too serious a business to be left to Generals alone"; and while the political authority has the right to lay down politico-strategic guidelines, the execution of those guidelines is best left to the military leadership. Equally important is that there should be no interference in the internal autonomy of the armed forces. Both these principles were violated in the lead up to 1962.

The rapid rise of Lieutenant General BM Kaul, the then-General Officer Commanding IV Corps, and the role played by the then-*Raksha Mantri* (Defence Minister) VK Krishna Menon were two key factors that would impact the performance of the Indian Army in 1962. While the former made his way up the hierarchy despite negative reports because he had Nehru's backing⁵⁷, Menon's style of functioning resulted in the side-lining of General SPP Thorat, the then-General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Eastern Command. These lessons remain relevant even today and should act as a deterrent to any political interference in the armed forces. At the same time, any shortfall in the senior military leadership has a cascading effect down the hierarchy and 1962 stands as a testimony to the failure of leadership at all levels.

Case Study 2: 1971: Redemption and Revival of Strategic Leadership

After India's setback in 1962, there was a revised focus on defence with PM Lal Bahadur Shastri and *Raksha Mantri* YB Chavan at the helm. The Indian Army put up a credible performance in the 1965 war against Pakistan. However, the structural fault lines remerged, with the Indian Air Force being kept out of the loop during the initial stages.

The death of PM Shastri at Tashkent in early 1966 resulted in political chaos, and it was the India's first woman PM Indira Gandhi who succeeded him to steer a remarkable transformation of strategic leadership from the time she assumed office.⁵⁸

The build-up to the 1971 war happened over a year. The crisis in East Pakistan exploded in early 1971 as millions of refugees crossed into Northeast India to escape the reign of unparalleled terror unleashed by the Pakistan Army. At such a moment of national crisis, the key players at the Centre acted in cohesion to craft an effective strategy to deal with it. The role of each has been examined in the succeeding paragraphs.

As Arjun Subramanian avers, “It is a fallacy to believe that the revival of strategic leadership began only in the run-up to the 1971 war, it began in 1967 on an altogether different front. During the Nathu La skirmish in Sep 1967, India stood up to the Chinese aggression and responded to fire with fire. Rather than displaying traditional Indian defensive mindset vis-à-vis China, PM Indira Gandhi backed the military leadership and stayed calm through the crisis”.⁵⁹

To resolve the unfolding crisis in East Pakistan, India formulated the return of refugees as the political objective. Ruling out immediate military intervention despite public pressure, India strategised to achieve the political objective through diplomacy. Concurrently, it calibrated indirect military support to the *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Army), keeping the option open to militarily intervene at an appropriate time as a last resort.⁶⁰

Despite being a strong personality, PM Indira Gandhi adopted a consultative approach, both diplomatically and militarily. Despite the growing pressures, she deferred to the sage advice of the then-Army Chief General (later Field Marshal) Sam Manekshaw to postpone military action till winters, when the Indian Army would be better prepared and the Northern passes would close, precluding pressure from

China. This also tied in with the diplomatic and intelligence advice given to her to not appear in a haste till the diplomatic option was exhausted.

An analysis of the Indian response through 1971 reveals that diplomatic efforts and the military preparations were undertaken simultaneously in tandem. A defining high point of India's grand strategy was taking the initiative to sign the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty of Aug 1971, tentative variants of which had been under consideration for over a year.⁶¹

In the public domain, strategist K Subramanyam convincingly projected the argument that it would be more economical to fight a war than to feed millions of refugees indefinitely. Checkmating the US and holding the Chinese was a result of a coordinated national security approach.

As Air Vice Marshal Kapil Kak writes, "It was the unparalleled synergy among the political, military, and diplomatic dimensions of the national crisis management and decision making that enabled India to take the initiative..... to achieve the desired political strategic outcome".⁶²

Credit must go to the political leadership led by PM Indira Gandhi, very ably supported by Sardar Swaran Singh and Babu Jagjivan Ram, who put national interest above all other considerations. The two ministers had the sagacity and weight to back their respective ministries' views in front of a formidable personality like PM Indira Gandhi. This is a good example to follow for a critical organisation like the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) today.

Of course, General Manekshaw was the man of the moment, determined to get glory for the nation and the armed forces. In this, he was ably supported by the Naval and Air Chiefs, Admiral SM Nanda and Air Chief Marshal PC Lal, who put the common objectives before individual service interests. What stood out was the sagacity, harmonious cooperation, and ability to stand their ground while speaking truth to power. These are lessons for present-day hierarchies who seem hesitant to do the same.

Mention must also be made of the outstanding advisors and bureaucrats who supported the politico-military hierarchy, particularly the contributions of the Defence Secretary KB Lall, Foreign Secretary TN Kaul, the External Intelligence Chief RN Kao, Chairman Policy Planning Committee DP Dhar, and Principal Secretary PN Haksar were remarkable. It was a dream team for India.

Case Study 3: Operation Parakram

Op Parakram was the largest military mobilisation undertaken by India in the wake of the attack on the Indian Parliament on 13 Dec 2001. The operation was aimed at building up Indian Armed Forces along the India-Pakistan border and involved the deployment of over 5,00,000 troops to the international border, including offensive formations from the hinterland. The deployment continued for almost a year, with the military remaining on high alert, and tensions between India and Pakistan remaining high. However, the operation ultimately ended without any significant military action, with both sides gradually pulling back their forces from the border.

The stretched-out mobilisation and consequent delay in concentration of strike formations gave ample time to Pakistan's external patrons to start exerting coercive pressures and mobilising world opinion against India. Also, being fledgling nuclear-capable states, the international community acted with alacrity to prevent or limit the war due to the possibility of escalation into a nuclear duel. Moreover, the prolonged mobilisation period gave the Indian political leadership time to waver under pressure, potentially denying the Indian Army its strategic advantage and the opportunity to achieve its military objectives.

One of the key challenges during mobilisation for Op Parakram was the lack of adequate infrastructure, particularly in terms of roads and bridges. This made it difficult for troops and equipment to be deployed quickly and efficiently, and increased the risk of accidents and delays. The operation also highlighted the need for a well-coordinated and effective higher defence organisation to plan and execute military operations successfully. The operation was marked by a series of ad-hoc deliberations between various stakeholders, including the political leadership, military hierarchy, and civilian officials, which led to confusion and delays in decision making.

Op Parakram also highlighted the need for seamless synergy and coordination, not only among the three Services but also between various stakeholders, to avoid delays and inefficiencies in decision making on such critical national security issues. But a key factor that led to delay in the mobilisation was the fact that formally the 'Union War Book' was not invoked, and the armed forces had to seek priority on a case-by-case basis.

The Indian Armed Forces had executed a full-scale mobilisation after a gap of almost 30 years. The major difference from previous mobilisations was the lack of forewarning, resulting in mobilisation from an absolute cold start. While in past conflicts, India's response had usually been reactive, a proactive approach had begun to gain favour this time, which necessitated a much higher state of operational readiness, as also a dynamic strategic analysis and decision-making apparatus. The experience of Op Parakram indicated that the prevailing national security organisation was not compatible with the kind of dynamic capability that was desired and a whole-of-government approach had become absolutely necessary.

Case Study 4: Operation Sindoor

Op Sindoor, which was conducted from 07 to 10 May, represented an evolution in India's war-fighting doctrine, showcasing the capability and ability of the armed forces. After 88 hours of clinical and precision strikes, the Indian Armed Forces, who had been given full 'Operational Freedom', achieved their objectives in a calibrated, controlled, and decisive manner. What also stood out in an era of unending conflicts was the wise drawing of a finish line.

There was a marked escalation in the scope, intensity, and precision targeting compared to India's earlier responses to terror attacks. Soon after, the PM articulated India's 'New Normal'. The doctrine was clear and unambiguous. This watershed moment marked the unveiling of a new national security posture, one that treats state-sponsored terrorism as an act of war.

Op Sindoor proved that conventional power, wielded with precision, can eliminate threats and convey a message without the attendant fear of a mushroom cloud. Pakistan's military-backed terrorist groups would no longer be able to operate with impunity, secure in the knowledge that India will not risk nuclear escalation.

Pakistan's space for nuclear deterrence has been shrunk due to India's non-contact kinetic actions, facilitated by newer technologies.

There was no doubt that India had achieved its stated objectives. Its decisive response was not a product of improvisation but due to the professionalism of the Indian Armed Forces and the result of structural reforms and investment in India's defence capabilities to include doctrines, weapon systems, and infusion of cutting-edge technologies.

The contours of its response toolkit had been redefined. The instrument of force became more calibrated and precise. There is no doubt that in future, India's response in degrading assets enabling terrorism will be of a greater magnitude. Bharat was able to use force over a long trajectory and attack Pakistan at will with precision and lethality, degrading its capabilities.

The operation stands as a powerful testament to the efficacy of the whole-of-government approach in addressing complex national security challenges. Conceptualised and executed in a rapidly evolving security environment, the operation went beyond conventional military responses by orchestrating coordinated actions across multiple arms of the government.

At its core, the operation involved a high-precision kinetic strike capability spearheaded by the armed forces. However, what set Op Sindoor apart was the seamless integration of military objectives with diplomatic, informational, internal security, and developmental efforts. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) played a critical role in engaging regional stakeholders and preemptively managing international opinion, ensuring that India's strategic actions were both defensible and aligned with its geopolitical interests. Simultaneously, intelligence agencies provided real-time situational awareness and threat mapping

that fed directly into operational planning. In essence, Op Sindoor validated the whole-of-government approach model, showcasing how an integrated, multi-agency national effort can transform isolated tactical victories into lasting strategic advantage and resilience.

Glaring Shortfalls at the Strategic Level

The initial decision making to launch the response to the attack on Parliament, to say the least, was ad-hoc with little coherence in the overall design and approach. The CCS meeting failed to arrive at a focussed approach, deciding instead to order a full-scale mobilisation of the armed forces. The final decision to go to war was to be taken subsequently by the government.

No political goals or the end state in terms of territory to be captured, and/or economic or combat potential to be destroyed was either discussed or decided. Admiral Sushil Kumar, former Navy Chief, has stated on record that he specifically asked for the political aim to be able to derive the military aim and objectives. Admiral Kumar's request was denied. Rather the directive was to mobilise for the present, the rest would follow. This was also confirmed to the author, Lieutenant General AK Singh, when he interacted with Shri Jaswant Singh at National Defence Academy in Pune in 2012.

Despite India's offensive doctrine having evolved over successive years based on past experiences, in Op Parakram, the country's response was still over-cautious and primarily predictable. The very concept of operations, from the time of mobilisation, from peacetime locations through the various phases of the planned offensive, was both time and force intensive. The forces had legislated a graduated build-up from peacetime locations and had laid down force levels to launch the

offensive, the build-up time, which itself was further delayed due to the 'Union War Book' being not invoked. This was a decision by an over-cautious bureaucracy and defied reason, thus, virtually narrowing the strategic window of opportunity that existed.

The role of the US as a facilitator to prevent conflict between India and Pakistan, and the multiple level parleys that took place, sheds glaring light on how disorganised the effort was to convincingly put across India's strategic view point to the US and the world community at large. To prevent the flare-up from spiraling out of control, the then-Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair and US Secretary of State Colin Powell visited both Pakistan and India. It was a balancing act by the duo, saying one thing in Islamabad and implying another in New Delhi. Two issues were critical: the shadow of Op Enduring Freedom (the initial phase of the war in Afghanistan and the broader 'Global War on Terrorism') and Pakistan's centrality to this, and the fact that India had not been able to convey its firm resolve to take the war to Pakistan soil. New Delhi's demands on Islamabad, through the world community, were neither debated formally nor conveyed as a clear bottom line, more so in view of the clear advantage India had on the battlefield.

The government had ordered the mobilisation for Op Parakram before it could muster the political courage to take it to its logical conclusion.

Gap between Pivot Corps Offensives and Strike Corps Operations

The force build-up from hinterland to the respective theatre of operations was contingent on many tangible factors of distance and logistics. The necessity of addressing the large time-gap between the launch of Pivot Corps (defensive Corps) offensives and the launch of the Strike Corps (offensive Corps) to achieve surprise by taking advantage of relative unpreparedness of the enemy was not addressed. This was an issue that should have been discussed and resolved in peacetime deliberations between the highest political and military authorities, but in the absence of any such culture, it was not an issue.

Of course, post Op Parakram, detailed military analysis gave birth to the ‘Cold Start Doctrine’, Short Notice Intense Proactive Escalatory Continuum in military parlance. What remains unclear is whether this offensive doctrine had the explicit approval of the political leadership, thereby, diminishing its effectiveness during crises.

In a purely India-Pakistan context, there has been a hypothesis regarding the war-waging and sustenance capability of Pakistan vis-à-vis India. As per available estimates, this capability ranges between two to three weeks for Pakistan, whereas, India can sustain itself for a much longer duration.

Therefore, Bharat should have calibrated and structured response accordingly. However, in today’s context, especially after Op Sindoor, this hypothesis requires a revisit.

During the initial stages of Op Parakram, adequate information of enemy deployment, dispositions, and terrain was not available to the desired level. In fact, the very essence of the

intelligence cycle, which revolves around timely and accurate intelligence analysis, left much to be desired. This continues to remain a persisting weakness in India's strategic calculus, the Chinese surprise incursions in Ladakh in 2020, reinforces the belief that not much has changed.

Chapter 6

Challenges

The Democratic Pitfalls

India chose a wise democratic path at the time of Independence, and despite turbulence in the neighbourhood, Bharat has stuck to the chosen path of a federal democratic republic. This has bestowed great benefits for India in most spheres, including the socio-economic upliftment of the people. The democratic tradition has also been in-sync with India's political and cultural legacy, which manifests in the form of as federalism and unity in diversity.

However, one sphere where there are varying views is about the pitfalls of democracy i.e., national security. The handling of issues related to national security may often imply conduct and values at variance, if not contrary, to democratic norms.⁶³ India has walked this tightrope deftly, trying to reconcile and harmonise the sometimes conflicting requirements of security with the rule of law, such as civil rights and individual freedom.

The fundamental blocks of a nation's strategic culture fall in the spheres of military and politics. In a democracy, both these spheres must be balanced with sufficient overlap of responsibility and a clear understanding of the precedence of politics. In India, there is a third power centre, i.e., the bureaucracy, whose reluctance to formalise often fills the void to retain a balance. India's national security infrastructure reflects the dynamic of this triad.

Resource Constraints and Budgetary Issues

In the present geopolitical disorder and fragile instabilities, strength flows from economic might. Stability comes only when a nation is strong enough that it does not have to sacrifice its national interest to avoid war and can, if challenged, preserve it by war.⁶⁴ In a growing economy, democratic India has many takers for a slice of its budget. It is not a simple ‘Guns versus Butter’ debate, as some make it out to be. Of course, while being conscious of the adverse security environment facing the country, no government can ignore the gigantic task of socio-economic development, which does take away a major portion of the national budget. Despite a growing economy, such aspirations will grow.

Even within the ambit of national security, there are many claimants for a slice of the budget, though defence is the major claimant. At first glance, the defence expenditure serves to deceive. But on closer examination, the situation is quite different. At the start of 2010-11, defence expenditure made up 2.8 per cent of the GDP, but in 2021-22, this had declined to 2.1 per cent of GDP, clearly showing that defence has declined in priority relative to non-defence functions.⁶⁵ Even within the defence allocations, defence revenue and pensions take away a major share, leaving inadequate funding for modernisation under the capital head.

For defence modernisation, there is insufficient allocation towards niche technologies, and such challenges will continue, keeping in-view the complex security environment that India faces, including a collusive ‘Two-Front Challenge’. The present inadequate defence budget is a serious strategic

and intellectual concern. Obviously, someone must speak 'Truth to Power', and the earlier the better. The philosophy that 'We will fight with what we have' will be a gross dereliction in the face of complex challenges that India faces in the 21st Century.

Interagency Rivalries and Bureaucratic Hurdles

India's national security, defence organisations, and mechanisms face numerous internal hurdles, which include inter-agency rivalries and bureaucratic hurdles. Historically, India's Ministry of Defence (MoD) has been an almost exclusive civilian establishment, with civilian bureaucrats holding all key appointments, with most not possessing any expertise or experience in military affairs. Moreover, an exclusive civilian ministry interacting with the military has advertently created an 'Us vs Them' sentiment with resultant animosity between the two.⁶⁶

This archaic system and arrangement prompted the Indian Government to initiate much-needed reforms in the Ministry, through the creation of the CDS and Department of Military Affairs (DMA), but is still a work in progress, with many loopholes still to be plugged. Inter tri Services rivalries, especially with reference to the defence budget and procurement, add to the woes.

Other main frictions are clearly evident, both within the MoD and between the MoD and the MHA, as also the overbearing role played by the NSA, mostly to the disadvantage of defence. Apart from being interagency or inter-ministerial issues, it is also a matter of turf and attitudes. Mechanisms are available at various levels to iron out the problems, but in this matter, political will and political

coordination has to take the lead, sending an appropriate signal down the channels.

Crisis Management and Escalation Control

Within a span of two decades (1999-2020), India and Pakistan have clashed seriously on at least four occasions, along with ongoing proxy war unleashed by Pakistan. Op Sindoor launched on 07 May 2025 followed the Balakot counter airstrikes, deep inside Pakistan, on 26 Feb 2019. Two nuclear-armed adversaries engaging in air combat is as dangerous as it can get. This time the targeting was wider, more intense, and carried out by not crossing into Pakistan air space.

With China too, despite robust mechanisms in place, India has the current standoff in Ladakh. Against a nuclear backdrop, it is imperative for the national security organs, mainly the political leadership, the diplomats, the intelligence organisations, and the armed forces in all three countries to come to some common understanding of crisis management and escalation control, so that India does not drift into an unintended conflict.⁶⁷

War and conflict have become very unpredictable and destructive in the 21st Century. It is imperative that the focus should be on ‘Conflict Prevention’ and on crisis management and escalation control, to prevent the crisis from reaching a point of no return.

With China, despite broken trust and tense face-offs, at least talks are going on at multiple levels. However, with Pakistan, the danger gets multiplied due to a lack of communication and brinkmanship. This remains a major challenge for India’s national security and necessitates a whole- of-government approach.

Strategic Communications

Op Sindoor represented an evolution in India's war-fighting doctrine, showcasing the capability and ability of the armed forces. It was also the first war fought in a highly informationalised battlefield, extending beyond traditional military engagements. In fact, the horrific attack in Pahalgam set in motion one of the most sophisticated information warfare campaigns in recent memory.

As Lieutenant General DS Hooda, former Northern Army Commander, wrote in the *Hindustan Times*, "While this was undoubtedly the worst bout of fighting between India and Pakistan since the Kargil War of 1999, it was also one in which a fierce parallel battle was playing out in the information space. This was the battle of perceptions conducted across television screens, media outlets, and social networks. The information domain has become a frontline in modern combat, where fake news is weaponised to create an alternative reality".⁶⁸

What is needed is a coherent strategy to win the war of narratives. This strategy must fuse real-time fact-checking, cyber defence, narrative control, and public engagement into a whole-of-government approach. Credibility is key to shaping perceptions, and this must always be protected. To quote Lieutenant General (Dr) Shokeen Chauhan, former Director General Assam Rifles, "The first requirement is institutional integration. Unlike Pakistan's unified approach through Inter-Services Public Relations, India's communication efforts remained fragmented across multiple agencies with poor coordination. A proposed Strategic Communication Authority could provide the central coordination necessary for effective information warfare, but such an institution would require

substantial investment in both human resources and technological capabilities”.⁶⁹ This undoubtedly calls for a whole-of-government approach.

Chapter 7

Future Direction and Recommendations

Critical Importance for a Formal National Security Strategy for India

Should India have a formal NSS? It is a popular opinion amongst the strategic community, academics, and the armed forces that it is time for India to formalise its NSS and put most of it in the open domain so that friends and foes alike are left in no doubt about where India stands. Several drafts have been attempted and circulated, with one of the authors having participated in the exercise while serving in the Military Operations Directorate at Army Headquarters. Alas, the NSS has continued to elude formalisation.

It is believed that a minority view, mainly propagated by the bureaucracy, has prevailed on the political authority, convincing them that India wields flexibility in pursuing various options at this stage of its development rather than being tied to definite courses. What is left unsaid is that this also allows those in positions of power to evade accountability, even though they have responsibility and authority. Much was expected of the Modi Government, but even they have shied away from taking the plunge.

India's NSS is intended to provide guidance to the country's leadership as well as its security apparatus to deal effectively with the threats and challenges, both external and internal, empowering India to achieve its legitimate aspirations in Asia and the world. It should be a comprehensive document

which should define the ends, ways, and means to achieve India's national security aims and objectives.

India's national security objectives, which flow from the national aims and interests, should cover the following:

- Defence of national territory and resources required against external threats and challenges.
- Maintain a secure internal environment.
- Empower the nation and its people.
- Strengthen India's role and position in Asia and the IOR.
- Promote and enhance India's role as an emerging global power, from being a rule follower to a 'Role Shaper'.

National Security Architecture

The national security architecture has evolved in the 21st Century. Post-Kargil conflict, based on the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee, it was decided to go in for a major overhaul of the national security apparatus and the procedures of decision making. The special focus was on strengthening the overall security framework and capacity building in the field of intelligence, internal security, border, and defence management.

The National Security Council (NSC) was created in Nov 1998 along with the post of NSA, with the charter to advise the PM's Office and CCS on matters related to national security and strategic concerns. A formalised integrated approach to national security thus emerged.

The Government of India, through a notification (08 Oct 2018), reconstituted the Strategic Policy Group (SPG), by bringing it directly under the charge of the NSA, which was under the Cabinet Secretary.⁷⁰ The SPG was seen as the first-ever formed mechanism established for inter-ministerial co-ordination and integration, assisted in this task by the NSC Secretariat and the NSA Board as its dedicated think tank.

Over the last two decades, the threats, challenges, and concerns facing the country have undergone many changes prompting necessary changes in the national security architecture. The revamped security architecture includes an additional NSA and three Deputy NSAs. Apart from a Military Advisor, there are two other senior military officers looking after the cyber, future technologies, and maritime coordination.

The current national security architecture has been revamped in keeping with the proactive approach of the present government to national security issues. When evaluated against recent crises, some shortcomings stand out, which need to be resolved for a more responsive whole-of-government. These are highlighted below:

- Overall responsibility for the 'Defence of India' still rests with the Defence Secretary; it is unclear what the current status is, after CDS and the DMA have been created. Rightly, it should rest with the CDS.
- While defence is now represented by three retired Lieutenant Generals (or equivalents) on the NSC, the armed forces still do not have an adequate

say in the formulation of security policies; rather, the executive continues to play the dominant role.

- Corporatisation of the public sector undertakings is still an ongoing process and needs to be completed earliest.
- India's old policies on sustenance and war wastage rates are dated. As current trends show, there is a need to create systems and structures for optimising the economy from a peacetime to a wartime economy. This certainly will need a whole-of-government approach.
- Personnel manning various security structures are more from a bureaucratic background, whereas, the need of the hour is to pick up experts from diverse fields, both civil and technocrats. India also needs to create a clear linkage between academics and practitioners. This certainly needs a whole-of-government approach.

Presently the NSC is an advisory body. There is a need to seriously evaluate whether they need to be given an 'Executive Role' through an Act of Parliament.

Additional Recommendations

Some suggestions have been outlined below which merit serious consideration:

- **Professional Military Education.** Professional military education at the operational and strategic level leadership requires a whole-of-government and should be recast in tune with future conflicts. There is a need to re-orient and restructure

the philosophy, from a threat-cum-capability to a future capability model.

- **Indus Water Treaty (IWT).** Following the Pahalgam terrorist attack, the government's decision to hold in abeyance the IWT due to sustained and continued cross-border terrorism is a carefully calibrated and executed decision, and is reflective of a whole-of-government approach. This is where a decision at the apex level would have been taken after inputs from the NSA, MoD to include the three Services, the MHA, MEA, the Jal Shakti Ministry, the Ministry of Law, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting as well as the State Government of J&K.
- **Strategic Communications.** There is a need for a strategic communications structure as it is a national security issue. There should be an apex body or authority dealing with communications, created by an Act of Parliament on the lines of National Disaster Management Authority, University Grants Commission or NITI Aayog, leading to a multi-disciplinary body with scope to progressively enhance and detach domains. As per Lieutenant General Shokeen Chauhan, "India must move from reactive damage control to proactive global narrative leadership. No longer responding with the official statements, India should instead pre-position messaging, evoke empathy, and structure its diplomacy in public as well as private domains. And it must do so while upholding democratic values—accuracy, transparency, plural representation, and respect for human dignity".⁷¹

- **Cyber.** There is a need to have the National Cyber Security Strategy promulgated at the earliest. Furthermore, a National Cyber Security Act also needs to be promulgated in conjunction.
- **AI.** Indigenous AI engines should be developed using Indian databases, and a comprehensive National AI Framework should be established. Users from the strategic community, including those in R&D, must be sensitised to exercise caution while using external AI tools.
- **EW.** Armed forces should be able to drive electromagnetic spectrum requirements in Defence Interest Zones and in training areas. EW capabilities should be enhanced through public-private participation. Space-based EW capabilities should be worked upon.
- **Emerging Threats.** Op ‘Spider Web’ exposed what happens when countries are attacked from within. The drones flew low, through unmonitored gaps, exploiting assumptions about what kind of threat was faced and from where. In low-level airspace, responsibility fragments and detection tools evidently lose their edge. Spider Web worked, not because of what each drone could do individually, but how the operation was designed. The cost of each drone was low, but the overall effect was high. This is not just asymmetric warfare, it is a different kind of offensive capability for which nations need to adapt.⁷² For India, this is a clarion call to break free from its

conventional mindset. Op Spider Web underscores that national security is no longer solely the function of defence forces but merits a whole-of-government approach. The civilian domain—encompassing ports, airports, railway networks, telecom infrastructure, and the digital backbone of commerce—is now a battleground. India must establish an integrated ‘National Security Grid’ that brings together civil administration, intelligence, law enforcement, private enterprise, and the military in a seamless security architecture.⁷³

- **Procurement Process.** Current models of procurement will not meet the demands of induction of new technology. A new model needs to be created, as often technology outpaces the procurement cycle. For this, there is a need of jointness between the armed forces as end-users and the defence manufacturing establishment in India, both public and private, the Defence Research and Development Organisation, and academia that are increasingly part of the efforts to achieve *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (Self-reliant India) in the defence sector and, coupled with these, is the bureaucracy at the MoD to also include Defence Finance.⁷⁴

- **Civil-Military Fusion (CMF).** The convergence of military and civilian resources and systems for maximising a nation’s ability to express its comprehensive national power, both during war and peacetime, is imperative. Qualitative aggregation of resources and capacities from both the civil and military domains is the cornerstone of CMF. The circulation of resources between civilian and military

departments as well as private industry and academia has been inadequate, though the foundational metrics are undergoing rapid changes. The establishment of the CDS and DMA has been path-breaking as it empowered the three Services to think, articulate, design, and drive change in the national security architecture. However, despite these changes, India's delivery in terms of CMF has been sub-optimal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, making India secure is a multifaceted endeavour that requires a cohesive strategy across various domains, which is best termed as a whole-of-government approach. By focusing on socio-political stability, economic prosperity, technological prowess, diplomatic finesse, robust defence mechanisms, and strengthening national institutions, India can navigate the complexities of the 21st Century and emerge as a resilient and secure nation. The path forward will require collaboration among government, civil society, academia, and the private sector to foster a holistic approach to security that benefits all citizens. As India continues to evolve in a rapidly changing global landscape, a commitment to these key components will ensure not only national security but also a brighter future, peace, and prosperity for all its people.

Wars in the modern times are fought by the nation, and not just the armed forces alone. This strengthens the call for a whole-of-government approach and the support for the nation. This can only happen if the nation is taken into confidence and cover-ups are avoided. In today's informative age, news cannot be suppressed and must be shared to the permissible extent operationally. All stakeholders should be kept abreast and contribute as part of a structured system and format. *Raksha Mantri* Rajnath Singh aptly summed it while delivering the PC Lal Memorial Lecture in May 2022, "The 1971 war is the finest example of the whole-of-government approach, not only for the armed forces but for the national security".⁷⁵

In the absence of a formal NSS, there was a clear mismatch between the thought process of the political and military authorities at the highest level, as was clearly evident during various phases of Op Parakram. The Indian Military was ready to take the calculated risk, but apparently, the civil leadership backed out.

What is the strategy now? Cold Start or Proactive Strategy? What is still not clear is, if this offensive doctrine had the nod of the political authority, thus, diminishing its effectiveness in crisis situations. It was undoubtedly a failure in Op Parakram. Is there a need to refine it or shelve it? Is there a requirement of a fresh strategy to flow out of the NSS?

After Op Parakram, writing for *The Print*, Lieutenant General HS Panag opined, “Who and what was responsible for the fiasco? Was it the dithering government with no strategic vision? Was it international pressure? Was it the nuclear threat? Or was it an ill-prepared military? In my view, it was a combination of all these factors”.⁷⁶

The recently concluded Op Sindoor was a calibrated use of force, intended to signal resolve, degrade terrorist infrastructure, and demonstrate capability and establish deterrence while controlling the escalatory ladder without crossing the line into broader war. The Indian Armed Forces successfully executed its assigned tasks in Op Sindoor with precision and professionalism. The operation was conducted in a deliberate and discreet manner, aligned with national objectives. As per Lieutenant General Ghai, “Op Sindoor was conceptualised with a clear military aim to punish the perpetrators and planners of terror and to destroy their terror infrastructure”.⁷⁷

Op Sindoor's success was also attributable to the whole - of-government approach, wherein, all the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic measures were synergised to achieve the stated military objective of dismantling the Pakistan military-supported and sponsored terrorist infrastructure and establishing credible deterrence for the future. At the heart of Op Sindoor's success was the essential alignment between political will and military execution.

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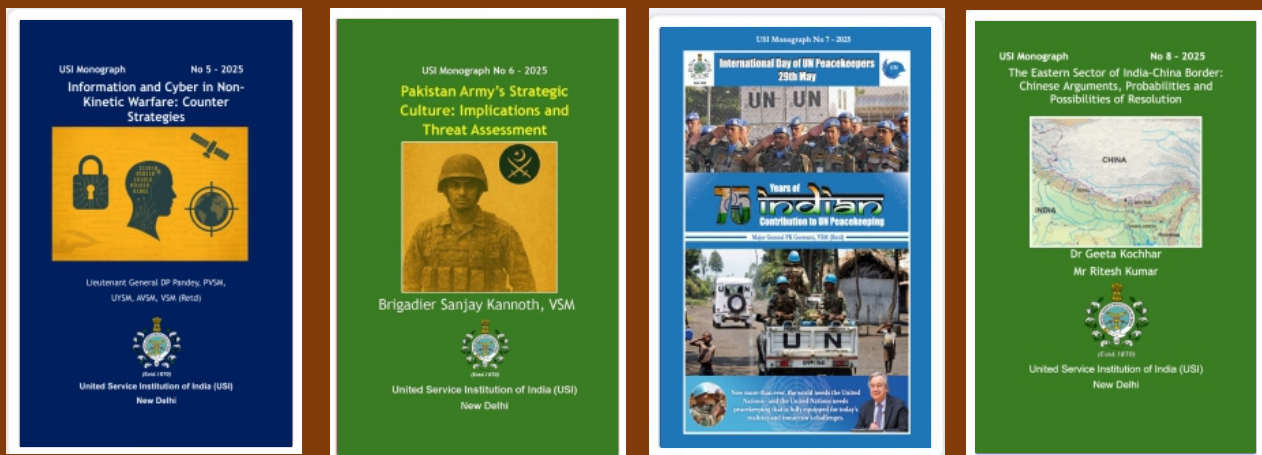
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