



# Special Report

FEBRUARY 2014

ISSUE # 4

## National Security: The Need for a Doctrine

**Manoj Joshi and Abhijit Iyer-Mitra**

Many strategic analysts in India have suggested that the country evolve a national security doctrine to guide its armed forces and governmental system in dealing with matters relating to national security. This has reportedly been specifically recommended by the Naresh Chandra Task Force on National Security in 2012. The Observer Research Foundation took the initiative to examine the issue in its entirety. This report details the outcome of a discussion amongst noted security experts and the background paper it was based on.

There are many meanings of the word “doctrine”, most of which have a religious connotation and pertain to fundamental beliefs or principles. In strategic literature, however, the term can be viewed as the authoritative principles—articulated in a variety of ways—which provide the framework within which the security and foreign policies of a country can be constructed. A doctrine is distinct from a national security strategy which outlines the means to be adopted to achieve the goals outlined by a doctrine. However, it can be viewed as the “grand strategy” of a nation. In that sense a national security doctrine or grand strategy guides the higher purpose of a country's defence and security policies. Simultaneously, it assists a nation to identify and develop the elements of what will constitute comprehensive national power.

Some nations outline their doctrines through policy statements, white papers, and solemn declarations; others choose to remain silent or ambiguous. One of the earliest and well known articulations was that of the Monroe Doctrine by the United States on December 2, 1823. It was named after President James Monroe and stated that if any European country tried to colonise or interfere in America, it would be considered an act of aggression. It also underscored George Washington's view that the US will not get involved in European affairs. At this time, the US was not a major power and lacked the ability to actually enforce its stated declaration. So the actual enforcement was left to the foremost power of the day, Great Britain, which had its own interest in ensuring that European powers were kept out of the Americas. It has been said that the real author of the Doctrine, then Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, saw it in

Observer Research Foundation is a public policy think-tank that aims to influence formulation of policies for building a strong and prosperous India. ORF pursues these goals by providing informed and productive inputs, in-depth research and stimulating discussions. The Foundation is supported in its mission by a cross-section of India's leading public figures, academics and business leaders.

terms of a moral opposition to colonialism. But as we know, doctrines themselves are not necessarily oriented towards the articulation of moral or ethical values. They are, principally, the statement of the core interests of a particular nation. Such statements, steeped in reality and pragmatism, can simultaneously be declaratory, ideological or, as was the case with the Monroe Doctrine, aspirational.

## India and a National Security Doctrine

When we speak of a national security doctrine for India, we do mean a set of basic principles, based on the core interests of the State, that will shape the way in which different elements of national power will protect and further the interests of the Indian Republic. In particular, there is need to focus on the elements of a strategic doctrine which will identify the general missions and basic principles through which our armed forces, diplomatic and intelligence communities will seek to attain the national goals. Ideally, they ought to be publicly articulated so as to reassure the citizens and warn adversaries, actual and potential. In more practical terms, in the famously diverse country like India, a doctrine can provide clarity within the vast and disparate political, societal and governmental structure where, more often than not, people work at cross-purposes, often not intentionally but because they lack a clear understanding of policy and its imperatives. In the process, doctrine can help weld them together towards achieving a common purpose.

According to Ashley Tellis, from 1947 onwards, “India pursued a grand strategy focused on preserving political unity amid its bewildering diversities and potential rifts, protecting the nation's territory from internal and external threats, and realising the economic development that would transform the country into a genuinely great power.” India may not have a self-consciously articulated national security doctrine. But in practical terms, there are a few coherent set of ideas which can be said to constitute a doctrine. India self-consciously inherited the legacy of the British Raj, even though it eschewed its more forward commitments in Tibet and the Indian Ocean area.

If you string together the various decisions on a particular subject by India's supreme policy-making body—the Cabinet Committee on Security—they can be seen to have a doctrinal import. It can be argued therefore that India's doctrine in relation to its principal adversaries, since the nuclearisation of the subcontinent, has been one of strategic restraint and engagement. On one hand India has vigorously defended itself against the Pakistani covert assault, or Chinese pressure on the Sino-Indian border, and on the other, it has maintained a posture of engagement through various confidence-building measures and formal dialogue.

At another level, there is some doctrinal authority provided by what is called the Defence Minister's Operational Directive to the armed forces which, however, is a secret document. In the early 1980s, it enjoined on the forces to maintain a posture of “dissuasive deterrence” with regard to Pakistan and one of “dissuasive defence” vis-à-vis China. Translated into policy it meant a strategy that could envisage the ability to strike deep into Pakistan, while in the case of China the armed forces were enjoined to have the ability to mount a defence of Indian territory. In recent years, Shivshankar Menon, the National Security Adviser, too, has made pronouncements on the nature and purposes of Indian power in various public lectures.

Following the nuclear tests of 1998, the National Security Advisory Board came out with a draft nuclear

doctrine which spoke of India maintaining a “credible nuclear deterrent” based on a triad of nuclear forces. This draft did not receive an official imprimatur, and what passes off for the official Indian doctrine is the press release of January 4, 2003 which listed a number of points of doctrinal import, as well as issues relating to the operational arrangements around the Indian nuclear weapons. One factor that does become apparent is that India does not accept the concept of nuclear war-fighting; rather, its weapons are only for retaliation against a nuclear, chemical or biological attack.

In the Indian context, all three Services have, in the past decade, issued new war fighting doctrines. According to Walter Ladwig, Lecturer in International Relations at Oxford University, the Army seeks to leverage advanced technology to fight short-duration wars in a nuclear environment; the Navy seeks a potent blue water role with the introduction of nuclear armed submarines; the Air Force wants to extend its strategic reach from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca. But the military doctrines can only be a subset of the national security doctrine, and indeed, there is urgent need for India to come up with a joint war fighting doctrine, instead of relying on single-Service doctrines. This is a deeply unsatisfactory state of affairs. It has often resulted in ad hoc responses, with various authorities and forces improvising to meet a crisis; since CCS decisions and the Operational Directive are largely secret, they lack the deterrent effect and predictability of an openly articulated doctrine. This routineness and predictability are important aspects of a doctrine because they bring to bear the power of the entire country and put adversaries on notice. Individual improvisation can work brilliantly at times, as did Vajpayee's Kargil response, but in another situation it could have divided the country and generated panic. On the other hand, it can be argued, had India clearly articulated the view that an attack on Jammu & Kashmir would mean an attack on India which could lead to a response at a place of our choosing, Pakistan may not have undertaken the 1965 misadventure.

As for the armed forces, sometimes their doctrines seem to be at variance with the objectives of the civilian leadership in the country. In the past decade, even while the political leadership has been seeking dialogue and a negotiated settlement on Kashmir with Pakistan, the army was developing the Cold Start doctrine which triggered off a Pakistani response, undermining the efforts towards dialogue. Another issue is the lack of a joint leadership command of the armed forces; the three Service doctrines stress their own respective positions without a coherent, common, approach. India's major problem is the poor civil-military relations which hamper the emergence of a realistic strategic doctrine as well as effective Army, Navy, Air Force doctrines. The Service chiefs have operational autonomy, but their input in national policy-making is almost non-existent. Politicians and bureaucrats who run the Ministry of Defence know little about military issues. As a result, there has not been any publicly articulated expression of a grand strategy.

### **The Need for a Formal Doctrine**

Henry Kissinger once stated that the purpose of a doctrine was to translate power into policy. As is evident, India has not been able to bring its considerable power into the play of its policy. Or, when it has sought to do so, it has been in an unsatisfactory, incomplete manner. We need a clearer picture as to what our goals are as a nation State and what our core interests are; these goals and interests need to be understood not only by the armed forces and our adversaries, but also by the people of the country. This is all the more imperative because India is a poor country that cannot afford to waste vast sums on

acquiring military capability without thinking through its needs and priorities.

Scholars have attributed this lack of direction to a variety of causes. George Tanham and Stephen P. Rosen blame the divisions in Indian society for this. Rajesh Basrur has argued that it has to do with political choices and ideological preferences. In a more recent work, Stephen P Cohen and Sunil Das Gupta have argued that India has a deeply ingrained tradition of strategic restraint arising from “an ideological rejection of the use of armed force as a tool of colonisers. In rejecting colonisation, India has also rejected the instruments used by colonisers. After independence, the Cold War's neo-colonial hue solidified Indian preferences for restraint. Since then, the bureaucracy has institutionalised restraint in so thorough a manner that a breakout is hard to imagine in the absence of a major crisis”. Through the National Security Council system, India has taken baby steps to, first develop an understanding of, and then weld, the different aspects of national power—military, diplomatic, and economic. But from here to developing a single and coherent national grand strategy is a long step indeed.

There are many reasons why India now needs a formal national security doctrine:

- First and perhaps the most important arises from the fact that India is now a nuclear weapons state and it confronts adversaries who also possess such weapons. The threat of nuclear destruction requires the country to understand with great clarity the imperatives of power and how it must be used, and this lucidity can only be provided by a formal doctrine.
- Second, in times of crisis, especially one that can result in the launch of nuclear armed missiles, there could be little time for consultation or deliberation. By breaking down the elements that go into our decision-making and allowing us to critique or modify them in advance, a doctrine enables us to provide a practiced response, rather than one which will be ad hoc and haphazard. A clearly articulated doctrine acts like an algorithm that aids policy-makers to take decisions, and for our countrymen to understand them. We are too familiar with the confusion and dithering that grips our political class at the time of a crisis because there is no clear-cut and customary response available. The IC 814 hijacking is a case in point.
- Third, a publicly articulated doctrine offers an advanced warning to our adversaries as to the likely lines of our response. Had Pakistan been sufficiently forewarned that an attack in Kashmir could result in an Indian riposte to Lahore, it may have avoided the 1965 misadventure.
- Fourth, a doctrine enables the vast government system which, in India, still functions in silos to be on the same page in relation to a national security issue. In other words, all parts of the government, state and central will have a clear idea as to what the country's response must be to a particular national security problem.
- Fifth, a doctrine helps to evolve patterns of thinking and structures to adjudicate competing claims for resources. For a poor country with a great demand on its resources, these do not relate to merely to inter se priorities between say, the Army, which wants a 60,000-strong mountain strike corps and the Navy, which is looking for more conventional submarines and aircraft carriers, but to the larger goals of the nation. A doctrine can lend clarity to the missions expected from the

armed forces and hence their equipment strategies. How probable is a war with China over the mountains or in the Indian Ocean, or both, in the coming two decades? Depending on the answer, decisions can be taken to equip our forces for offensive action or for shoring up their defences. The difference between the two could lead to a vast amount of money being freed for development purposes.

- Sixth, the citizens of this enormous country, who are ethnically and linguistically diverse, need to know the goals and interests of the nation with some clarity. Otherwise, this articulate and argumentative democracy tends to become a babble of confused voices.

### Sources of a Doctrine

A doctrine cannot emerge out of a vacuum. It is vitally rooted to the history, geography and culture of a nation. In the case of India that can be extremely complicated as its civilisational history goes back thousands of years, but the history of its nationhood is just a little over 60 years old. That brief time, however, encapsulates enormous changes in which the country's geography was first truncated but its population has burgeoned. Within the compact of its foundational document, its Constitution, the nation has encouraged diversity, enabled previously marginalised sections of its population to emerge in their own right. At the same time, there are times when this very diversity has acted as a hindrance and occasionally, a factor in distorting national policy. Then, there is the political and governmental history of the young nation which has seen great achievements as well as persistent failures.

The country's political development and governmental achievements and non-achievements are elements that will have to be factored into any doctrine. The doctrine must give us clarity about the things we should fight for, the resources we should employ and the degree of force we need to use or abjure. Equally, we must incorporate into our doctrine an understanding of the strategic calculation of our adversaries. We know what deters us, but do we know what deters our adversaries? What their calculation of risk is? And the extent they will go to use force to achieve their objectives? What our doctrine must aim at is to shape events in the directions we desire. A doctrine requires us to have faith in the victory of ourselves and our goals since a society which is convinced of its future has a better chance against one that is status quoist. Any doctrine must be clear about the nature of our strategic interests in the world. The most fundamental of core interests of the country is the protection of the country's sovereignty and the concepts of justice and rights that it enshrines. The essence of the 1950 Constitution that welded together a bunch of disparate states with different languages and cultures into a nation is that it is a “sovereign, secular, democratic republic”.

### The Debate

On August 31, 2013, ORF held a consultation to brainstorm India's national security strategy and the national security doctrine. Prominent members of India's strategic community present at this consultation were:

- Dr Sanjaya Baru, Director for Geo-economics and Strategy, International Institute for Strategic Studies
- Lt General (retd.) A S Lamba, former Vice Chief of Army Staff and GOC-in-C Army Training Command

- Ambassador Shyam Saran, former Foreign Secretary
- Rear Admiral (retd.) Raja Menon, former Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Ops)
- Brigadier (retd.) Gurmeet Kanwal, former Director Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS)
- Ambassador Gopalaswami Parthasarathy, former High Commissioner to Islamabad
- Admiral (retd.) Arun Prakash, former Chief of Naval Staff
- Dr Arvind Virmani, former Economic Advisor to the Government of India
- Air Marshal M Matheswaran, Deputy Chief Integrated Defence Staff

In addition, there were serving representatives of the Indian Navy and the National Security Council Secretariat

Following introductory remarks by Mr Sunjoy Joshi, Director, ORF, three questions were posed to the experts:

- What should the contours of a national security strategy be?
- How will this translate into a doctrine?
- How will threats be graded and what will determine responses?

The following is a summary of the discussion chaired by Dr. Manoj Joshi that followed and reported as per Chatham House rules:

While it was argued that the creation of a complex interdisciplinary National Security Strategy, and a comprehensive National Security Doctrine that flows from and provides directions to the State's security apparatus was an imperative for academic interest, this view was not shared. Should a nuclear crisis arise, there is no time for engagement. A doctrine that handles the conventional peace environment and most certainly addresses or gives some kind of understanding as to how a crisis of the order of an impending nuclear strike can be handled, is important. But more importantly, it also lays down a long-term arc under which medium-and short-term policy can be welded. For example, in 1945, Theodore Von Karman wrote a report titled "Towards New Horizons". This report identified quantitative curves and dominant technologies and set the template for the United States' technological progression for the next 60 years.

In the discussion, there was a division with regard to India's ability to absorb a doctrine. There was an argument that for a variety of reasons significant structural, institutional, operational and intellectual changes were required before India was ready to formulate, create, absorb and implement a national security strategy and a doctrine. Till such changes were made, the formulation of a National Security Strategy and Doctrine would remain an exercise on paper. For example, during the Mumbai 26/11 attacks, procedures were in place for a very long time to deal with similar scenarios. Yet, when the actual event happened, all the drills and procedures were cast aside in favour of ad-hoc responses from virtually everyone in the loop. Good policy therefore is fundamentally dependant on the understanding of and working with structural limitations.

Participants also noted the ORF exercise was not the first. In fact the National Security Advisory Board had on the specific request of the National Security Advisor, formulated a doctrine some years back, which subsequently "disappeared" in the system. The value of an academic exercise in creating a parallel

strategy and doctrine was to ensure that such “disappearances” did not happen and that concepts, theories and priorities could be openly debated and form a secondary source of feedback to decision makers not encumbered by bureaucratic procedure.

That said, any doctrine must incorporate such institutional and operational limitations, as any strategy or doctrine is only as good as those implementing it. *The Economist* has pinpointed very accurately the deficiencies India confronts; a less than sufficient diplomatic core, great gap between the military and civilian Ministry of Defence, and the inability to produce weapons of any sort. We seem to be stuck in a time warp with a Ministry of Defence that is a politico-bureaucratic beast which is totally outdated. While the politician is too detached and guided by pentennial electoral considerations, the bureaucrat is transient. Consequently, there is no accretion of expertise to debate issues, understand problems or implement solutions. The big impact of this is that within the system there is no ability to discuss and debate national security priorities. Collectively we suffer from the Panipat syndrome as Air Commodore Jasjit used to say. We wake up when the invaders are at the gates of Delhi; till then, we dig our heads into the sand. That is our strategic culture; it is a reactive strategic culture rather than a proactive strategic culture.

The issue was also raised on reference points in order for projections to be made and limitations and vulnerabilities to be understood. For example, today India faces an exponential disparity vis-à-vis China. This has to be a reference point in terms of what we seek to achieve but also how we go about it. This also raises the question of brevity. It is not always necessary to create a national security doctrine that is verbose with micro detail and in perfect grammar. This is where a reference point is advantageous since it enables the creation of a brief directive; 20 words synchronised at the highest level to say this is the direction we need to go and in a format where people can put their heads together and start moving, that is updated, reviewed and or changed every two to five years. In America, virtually every President has changed his approach to warfare and security because the threats have actually changed; whether it was Communism at one time, or terrorism at another. Obama, for example, seems very comfortable not having a doctrinaire approach at all.

Ultimately, it was felt, we are not strong enough to speak our minds and the approach to consider is the Chinese one—“hide your capabilities, speak nothing or little”. In India we also have philosophical differences. For example, while the Abrahamic faiths are based on written texts, India's philosophy has been passed down orally. Clarity is not necessarily strength. Revealing your mind is not always necessary. Both approaches have their relative advantages and disadvantages. The problem really is that if we insist on not writing down our strategy or doctrine and on not circulating it to our decision makers and operational staff, how do we get everyone on the same page? This is compounded by the fact that it is unfeasible in a plural and open state like India to keep absolute secrets while at the same time, given its size and diversity, thought must be put down on paper for cohesion—this is after all not a small pastoralist tribe. Moreover, given the extant culture of not wanting to take responsibility, an openly expressed doctrine effectively forces persons to take ownership and act on issues. For example, spending USD 40 billion on defence, India still does not get effective defence unless it resolves the ambiguities and writes it down in some way. The armed forces and the Ministry of Defence need to know where they are going, why they are going there, what is the threat; and therefore, we should create

these instrumentalities for tackling various scenarios. For that limited purpose, we do need a doctrine. However, we also face a chicken-and-egg problem here. Unless one is clear of the component parts, how does one fit together a larger doctrine?

## Conclusion

Leaving aside these structural and operational issues, however, some points of agreement emerged. First, there was agreement that the National Security Strategy would be the broad interdisciplinary macro strategy for the purposes of the higher leadership of the country, while the actual National Security Doctrine, while still strategic, should provide specific guidance to the security apparatus of the state. This took off from an understanding of what a doctrine should be. The British believe that it is a set of beliefs and customs and traditions and concepts, whereas the American understanding of doctrine is that it includes some ingredients of strategy, ways and means.

Second, there was consensus that while the economic development of India was paramount, it was necessary to see security at a critical component of economics because of its industrial function, because of its knowledge function and, most importantly, because of its function of protecting economic gains. It was emphasised that this could not be made a bread or guns issue, rather it had to be emphasised that guns and bread are interlinked and one cannot exist without the other.

For example, energy, food and water security were clearly identified as important priorities in any national security strategy. However, what if tomorrow the Chinese pursuing their water, food and energy strategy were to start diverting the Brahmaputra? This has a clear impact not just on India's non-traditional security but an immediate and catastrophic spillover into traditional security. To put all these together, you would need strategies in each one of these separate fields with clearly defined objectives for each of these separate fields. It becomes a complex issue when it comes to integrating these separate strategies into a macro whole. This requires compromises and bridge building, which becomes a problem for a pluralistic country like India. Consequently finding a consensus definition of National Security becomes problematic. The first strategic defence review that NSAB came up with, in fact, went into all these issues and clearly categorised them and prioritised them. The problem therefore is not one of a lack of thinking or feedback on the subject, but rather one of absorbing, disseminating and operationalising a doctrine.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Manoj Joshi is a Distinguished Fellow at Observer Research Foundation. He writes extensively on Indian defence and security issues in national and international publications. Abhijit Iyer-Mitra is Programme Coordinator at ORF, with interests in India's defence and foreign affairs policies.



**Observer Research Foundation**  
 20, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi-110 002  
 Phone: +91-11-43520020 Fax: +91-11-43520003  
[www.orfonline.org](http://www.orfonline.org) email: [orf@orfonline.org](mailto:orf@orfonline.org)