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## The Imperatives of India's National Security

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### ABSTRACT:

National security is a broad concept that encompasses different aspects including economic, military, political, diplomatic and strategic calculations. India being a large major country with largest population on earth, has a peculiar problem vis-a-vis national security. This term has complex connotations and its real significance is not widely understood, at least in India. Very little amount of scholarly work in this domain has been done inside the country and surprisingly most of the intellectuals, prefer to see our national security from their perspective. The proliferation of information, social media and activism, mostly in democratic societies like ours, has made the situation ever trickier. A correct evaluation of the need and effective solutions will pave a long way to secure India's territorial, economic, political and strategic autonomy in the long run.

**Keywords: National Security, India, Operation Sindoor, China, NSA.**

National security is perceived to be the most important duty of a government of a state. There have been varied definitions of *national interest* offered by various scholars. However, one that is mostly accepted by all that it is the protection and promotion of interests, economic, strategic, military, political and diplomatic, as perceived by the government of the day. Such interests are expected to be broad-based, flexible and effective. How good or otherwise, such interests are protected or promoted, depends to a great extent upon the wisdom, sagacity and diplomatic maneuverability of the government of the day.

However, the fact is that among scores of functions a government has to carry out day in and day out, national interest is one aspect that is supposed to be given the maximum attention. As stated though, what constitutes national interest is something that is subjective and may vary from one government/leader to the other. To make it objective most of the bigger/powerful nations/powers have stated formally or otherwise some core interests that they expect not to be compromised and for them that is what forms their national interests.

Talking of India's national interests, the first and foremost aspect of course, comes to the protection of its territorial integrity. It becomes all the more important given that we are surrounded by two of the nuclear-armed hostile neighbours, China and Pakistan, with whom we have had a history of bitter fighting, conflict and border disputes. In the given scenario, protection of our territories has to assume the foremost consideration in terms of national security.

Since some parts of Indian territories are considered disputed, specially vis-à-vis China and Pakistan and both countries have never shown any inclination to hide their thoughts, formally or otherwise, we must understand even a slight hesitancy or indecision could very well cost us chunks of Indian territory. We have seen that China has repeatedly been using its notoriously popular, *salami slicing* tactics to keep usurping Indian territories, slowly, steadily without using a single weapon.

Pakistan on the other hand, irrespective of its own political, socio-economic crisis, continues to peddle its line of Kashmir being disputed and that given a chance, a part of the Kashmiri natives would wish to go along with it. Whoever remains in power there, the Pakistan Army continues to dominate the political and diplomatic discourse and to maintain its *numero uno* position in the country and to ensure that position continues, it will use Kashmir as hot potato till eternity as was evident in recent assertions of General Asim Munir. Bangladesh since the unprecedented and undemocratic takeover by Mohammed Yunus, has evolved into a possible hostile neighbor. Myanmar with its incessant instability continues to pose a serious security threat to north-eastern region of India. Nepal with its continued political instability and Chinese-supported communist dominance has evolved into another major security concern.

In the backdrop of all this, the so-called iron-brotherly relations between India's two hostile enemies, remain intact, in the midst of a few ups and down, though as was visible recently during India's *Operation Sindoor*. In such a scenario, India has to be highly prepared for an exigency where it may have to fight with Pakistan on one hand and face, indirect Chinese attacks/implicit invasion in varied domains like economic, commercial, cyber, political and strategic. At the same time, given the unexpected limitations faced by Chinese military equipments like HQ9, -HQ-16, PL-15 missiles, Wing Loong II drones, YLC-8E anti-stealth radar system along with J-10CE and JF-17 fighter jets during *Operation Sindoor*, further puts a question mark on real Chinese military capabilities against India.

As part of the national security infrastructure, the country already has built an institutionalized mechanism in the form of National Security Advisory Board (NSAB). The National Security Advisor (NSA) currently being acted as by the indomitable Ajit Doval, functions as the one-point advisor to the Prime Minister, is directly responsible for receiving, collating, analyzing and disseminating directly to the PM and the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). There are two or more Deputy NSAs working directly under him, conveying and updating him with all the relevant inputs relating to the national security, as and when required.

A very critical institutional reform in security infrastructure has been the appointment of a single-point military advisor to the government in the form of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). This recommendation was made decades ago by K Subramanyam Committee following Kargil War. Its effectiveness has been realized in the many bilateral and multilateral exercises conducted by military with friendly/allied forces. In the recent *Operation Sindoor*, its efficacy as a seamless force under an integrated military command structure, development of Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) are some of the important successes that may be attributed to this development.

We thus have a functional institutionalized national security apparatus to deal with security aspects. To make it more effective, we need to identify our objectives and goals along with a feasible time frame. In the context of India as currently the largest populated nation, fourth largest economy and seventh largest nation in the world with a great and ancient civilization, some of the basic desirable objectives could be, say for instance,

- a) To emerge as a developed nation economically with a high GDP about US\$ 10-12 trillion and a per capita income (PPP) about US\$ 20,500 by 2042. Though some might find this objective utopian or too far-fetched, a steady 6.5%-7% continuous growth in the next 15 years could see India reaching there.
- b) To ensure complete food security for its citizens by working on diversifying food basket including promoting the use of millets in Indian homes. Further modernizing Indian farming techniques and practices, using effective R&D in agricultural research, promoting horticulture, floriculture, pisciculture, poultry, dairying along with forestry could well provide a diversified, revenue-driven primary sector while creating work opportunities for millions. It could also touch upon a growing socio-economic menace of farmers' suicide that is also becoming a cause of concern for politico-administrative machinery.
- c) To develop a robust industrial/manufacturing base and ensuring manufacturing accounting for more than 35-40% of Indian economy. Though services sector continue to outperform but Production-linked Initiative (PLI) policy has had a positive impact with electronics sector and manufacturing of chips and *Apple* being the successful examples of new policies.
- d) To diversify the services sector with tourism (inbound/global/pilgrimage), software services (AI, data analytics, KPO others), hospitality, financial services, logistics accounting for almost 45-50% of our economy. The gradual development of GIFT City near Gandhinagar and its planned projection of a financial hub competitor to likes of Singapore, London and Shanghai could be interesting. The development of Buddhist tourist circuit along with popular pilgrim centres like Varanasi, Ayodhya, Ujjain, Puri, Vaishno Devi have already opened up and grown the inbound tourism significantly.
- e) Agriculture/fisheries/forestry accounting for rest i.e. about 10-12% of India's economy with forestry being given a big push as part of growing green economy.
- f) Energy security also to be given a huge importance in the security imperatives of the nation. Renewable energy resources like wind, tidal, biomass and solar should be given significant push in terms of policies and incentives. With a target of 500GW non-fossil energy capacity by 2030, India already has surpassed its target of 200 GW by 2023. Overall fourth globally in renewable energy installed capacity, with more technological developments it could raise the bar for itself as well as the world in next decade. Building up of petroleum reserves to 87-days from the current 75-days could well be another major pointer to India's security.
- g) Maritime security is another aspect that deserves top consideration for enhancing India's security. Security of commercial shipping lanes, especially Indian Ocean region and Malacca Straits require a strong, dynamic naval power with growing number of submarines, including nuclear, three aircraft carriers and modern, state-of-the-art frigates and destroyers to project power beyond. India also needs to have a more agile, sophisticated Coast Guard to protect its maritime territories. Further, big international ports on the lines of recently started Vizhinjam Port are also required to give impetus to Indian trade, economy and security.
- h) Big push to be given for R&D along with indigenization for production of weapons, ships, fighter jets, drones, missiles, hypersonic, laser and AI-assisted armoury. The objective should be not to depend on any one-two or group of nations for critical armaments, especially in case of a war with a hostile nation as was the case during Kargil conflict when we had to depend on Israel which thankfully helped us in times of crisis. Our rapid diversification, public-private partnership in defence and space sector, has been extremely fruitful as was realized during the successes of Indian military in brief 88-hour conflict recently. Work on indigenous advanced version of Tejas, fighter bombers and engines need a greater thrust. At the same time, commercial promotion of Indian air defence systems, artillery, rocket launchers, drones, missiles in the ever-growing global military market could also be a boost for Indian security as well as economy.
- i) Importantly, the internal security aspect deserves a huge attention. Currently some of the internal threats that we are facing includes, crisis in Manipur, extraordinary push of drugs/narcotics in India from Pakistan, Myanmar and south-east Asia and constant internal political crisis the nation faces from opposition parties, so-called Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) activists, specific media personnel, some academicians and the like. One of the noticeable successes in this domain has been impressive action against Naxalites who have been neutralized to a great extent.

In the domain of internal security, as part of the NSAB apparatus a Deputy NSA has been appointed to specifically look after the aspect of threats emanating from varied internal sources. In addition to the threat of terrorism, especially in the border regions of Kashmir valley, naxalite/maoist terror, north-eastern states some other states like West Bengal, Kerala, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh too have become hotspots for terror activities. It is absolutely imperative to ensure peace and harmony inside the country. And to make that happen, control of black money, constant economic activities, development, growth and creation of jobs and business opportunities are critical for India.

Since a rapid economic growth is not only important for a better standard of living for our citizens but also for the overall security of the country, we need to work out varied strategies and policies to attain such growth. The initiation of PLI for the manufacture of mobile phones, laptops, semiconductors and chips has shown positive results in a short span of time. This policy has resulted in at least three important benefits for India:

I. We have been able to create a value chain in India to an extent at the cost of China, our nearest rival and competitor. Some of the major global manufacturers like Apple, Samsung have shifted part of their manufacturing to India, affecting China economically as well as hitting its credibility as the only manufacturing hub of the world.

II. India has been able to project itself as a credible alternative to China. Further, our exports have touched record highs at over US\$ 820.93 Billion for FY 2024-25 helping us grow economically.

III. This PLI policy has indirectly helped in accelerating the economic slump of China that the country is witnessing now.

Development of an effective, innovative and competitive intelligence apparatus is also an important need to secure our nation. Thousands of years ago, Kautilya in his treatise, *Arthashastra*, talked of the need for an efficient espionage system for the security of the kingdom. That dictum is still relevant for India today.

Though the intelligence networks in India, Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) have strengthened with the addition of National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO), more efforts in using and expanding the Technical Intelligence (TechInt) and Human Intelligence (HumInt) is required. The fact that some of the notorious Khalistani, Kashmiri and Pakistani terrorists have been eliminated recently in far-flung Pakistan, UK and Canada only suggests that the reach of Indian intelligence agencies have increased, HumanInt is working more efficiently for India today than in last few decades.

In addition to, development of world-class physical and cyber infrastructure is important not only for building India's great power status but also to ensure its greater security. While work on the physical infrastructure in the form of new highways and expressways has been impressive in recent years and India in terms of world-class roads has become well-known now. It has led to further development and growth of ancillary service sectors in the vicinity, jobs and better connectivity, access to health, education, recreation and savings in terms of energy and time.

However, one aspect of roads/highways building that often go unnoticed is the huge impetus given to border roads infrastructure. One of the biggest reasons for our humiliating debacle in 1962 war against China was lack of border roads and remote connectivity. China too, had the same issue but it focused on that and especially from 1980s onwards, it put a lot of emphasis on building a world-class border infrastructure. Lately, we have been putting good emphasis on it. Good roads, bridges, tunnels, helipads capable of being used for dual purposes like civilian and military movements including heavy armoury, tanks mostly on the China borders have been created and many more are being worked on. So much so, that China has been forced to work more vigorously on its borders against India as for the first time in the last seven decades, it seems to be sensing India as a rival, economically as well as militarily.

The unprecedented number of cyber attacks on Indian government institutions, mostly scientific, defence and financial ones, including banks has witnessed an alarming rise in recent times. Again, it is interesting that maximum number of such cyber attacks have originated from China with some coming from Pakistan. It is also a well-known fact that China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has a dedicated unit for intercepting and attacking important institutions of countries who it perceives to be hostile nations through varied form of virus. Most victims of Chinese cyberattack have been Japan, India, US and some from the west. To deal with this, India's home-grown *Indian Computer Emergency Response team (CERT-IN)* and *Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C)* have made some important movement.

It is also expected that future warfare could more be of technological warfare involving cyber, information, drones and AI-assisted humanoids. China is one country that is reportedly working furiously on these areas and trying to reach ahead of even the US, currently the foremost military and economic power in the world.

India being the only one in Asia, matching the political, economic, diplomatic and military stature of China automatically emerges as its number one, unofficial enemy. In addition to, its decades-old salami slicing tactics, post-Doklam the aggressiveness of China needs to be taken as a good indicator of its intent, desperation and insecurity vis-à-vis India. Hence, India's own efforts in this domain too, deserve some serious attention.

While their works like that of the NSAB and NSA do not get any media attention, it goes without saying that they have been working relentlessly to protect India's strategic and financial infrastructure.

Information Warfare (IW) is another area that deserves significant attention from Indian strategic policy-makers and planners. IW is one domain that seems to be going against Indian interests. It is well-known that there has been a high degree of interference in India's internal affairs for some time. Starting from foreign governments, agencies, businessmen to funded and motivated media and activists and organisations, all have been working to

promote their respective agendas in the country that in many cases go against our national interests. As recently as the *Operation Sindoor*, western media in cahoots with Chinese-supported/funded media, played a crucial role in undermining Indian military successes against Pakistan.

There have been concerted efforts from some of them, in collaboration with some Indians, to undermine India's sovereignty and security. Such efforts became all the more evident especially after the government's decision of August, 2018 to abrogate Art 370 to remove the so-called special status of Kashmir.

Unwittingly, for decades we have allowed the Kashmir issue to snowball and fissure resulting in growing dissatisfaction among the natives of the state. The governments of the past had been aware of the root cause of the problem but they allowed it to simmer without trying it to solve fully in accordance with India's national interests.

Instead of allowing Indian Army to capture the whole of Kashmir in 1948, Nehru government used a wrong UN provision suggesting Kashmir a dispute instead of presenting the case as one of Pakistani aggression. Further, post-1971 victory nobody is aware what prevented the then government to bargain the release of 90,000 plus Prisoners of War (POWs) from Pakistan Army to coerce Pakistan for accepting Kashmir as part of India.

However, some deft diplomatic and strategic manoeuvres this time has ensured that silently and tacitly most of the world community has acceded to Indian decision on Kashmir. The most satisfying part is that the Arab world and almost the whole of Muslim Umma, 57-member Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the western world have supported India.

A complete return to peace and normalcy, fast economic development and creation of jobs and business opportunities are critical for ensuring the success of this move. Kashmir issue however, has another-less talked about angle i.e. of Aksai Chin. The strategic region of Kashmir handed over by Pakistan to China in early 1960s and which China has desperately been projecting its territory. Its military significance is critical and from security perspective India needs to keep a close watch on China's moves there as well as in the occupied-Tibetan region.

India's national security imperatives are based on complete peace within, secure internal borders, a fast-paced economic development, creating jobs and business opportunities, proper dissemination of information, control of fake news/ information and robust building of internal and military infrastructure. In terms of diplomacy and foreign relations, some of the major factors that should get attention of planners and policy-makers could be summarized as follows:

- a) While relations with the US should get more profound, mostly in commercial/economic/intel sharing terms, effective co-ordination and communication at the highest levels of government and administration is required.
- b) Russia remains a faithfully ally but in the context of fast-paced geo-political changes, there could be situations where Russia might have to stand as neutral, especially in the likely scenario of an India-China limited conflict. India needs to continue procuring its military hardware needs from Russia but at the same time, develop its own military infrastructure with a specific time-frame and planning.
- c) In the west, India's relations are likely to remain smooth vis-à-vis governments of states but there turbulence is likely through the non-state actors who continue to play a dominant role in western politics. The situation could be tricky but India needs to handle them diplomatically, mostly behind the scenes through effective communication and talking less about them in public. Greater emphasis on improving economic and strategic relations with nations like France, Italy, UK, Hungary, Belgium, Romania and Poland should be considered.
- d) India's relations with the Arab world and OIC in recent years have seen a remarkable turnaround. With economy and reforms being the key concerns on both sides, India could well use the opportunity to shore up FDI from there and smoothen politico-diplomatic and in some cases strategic relationships with countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman.
- e) There are major troubling actors like Turkiye. With Erdogan firmly in saddle, India needs to maintain diplomatic niceties while also getting involved in its neighbourhood, Cyprus and Greece. That will actually trouble Erdogan who is likely to tone down his rhetoric on India's Muslims and Kashmir. It actually yielded results in the form of Erdogan skipping any references to Kashmir in his recent address to UNGA.
- f) Central Asia as the former USSR is another region that deserves Indian attention from a security point of view. Huge natural resources and accessibility along with extraordinary Chinese attention in the region, Pakistan-Turkiye and Azerbaijan proximity are other factors that could affect Indian security calculations in the region. While trying to balance its bilateral relationship with Azerbaijan (in spite of some provocations from there), India has developed a robust military relationship with Armeniawho has emerged as the leading importer of Indian defence supplies.
- g) Africa is being used by China to dump its inferior goods and materials while using its much-touted Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to further its economic exploitation and strategic goals. India with a lot of goodwill in the region needs to get its act together, promote its economic, political and diplomatic partnerships in the region (the inclusion of African Union in the G20 through Indian support and persuasion is one very positive development) and compete with China to secure a stronger foothold. Selective strategic visits by PM Modi and EAMJaishankar to Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique is also aimed at evolving strong politico-economic-strategic partnerships.
- h) And finally, in south Asia and its neighbourhood, India needs to be wary of increasing Chinese tentacles in the form of BRI and propaganda. With India rightly declining any involvement in the BRI and many countries across the world now realizing the exploitative character of it (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Nepal all have been victims), we need to use diplomatic and political persuasion to handle regional matters and make our neighboursrealise that India really stands for "*One Earth, One Family, One Future*" which will have tremendous diplomatic benefits in the middle to long-run.

i) Afghanistan could be another security nightmare for Indian security planners. While there is huge lawlessness, disorder and violence and nobody is actually in the know who controls the whole nation, China is secretly making its way into the country. It of course, is eyeing the expected huge natural resources that are likely to get into their hands since all the major European Powers, Japan, US and India are not maintaining any diplomatic representation in Kabul. How to manage the situation in Indian national interests is something that is going to test adroitness of Indian diplomacy, military and political leadership. The low profile visits by senior MEA officials to Kabul, interaction with key Taliban leaders and continued Afghan-Pakistan political-military spat suggests that India is quietly working its way in corridors of power there.

j) Pakistan has been effectively dealt with in by India in recent years. Though initially Modi government tried to get into active diplomatic-political collaboration but post-Uri/Pulwama, a tactical strategic shift has taken place. And that has been in India's interests. Pakistan is on the brink of economic collapse, its political stature probably is an all-time low and diplomatically it does not count much internationally including within the OIC. The much-taunted first Islamic Nuclear Bomb too, has lost its significance drastically.

k) With China, pragmatism is the key. As Dr S Jaishankar, the EAM has rightly pointed out that China being a much larger economy we are not in a position to go straightaway into a war with them. However, we have to ensure that our core interests are not compromised, especially territory, we need to counter its salami-slicing strategically and militarily and ensure our disputed borders get adequate infrastructural attention. We have to make sure we hit out China in regions where it gets hurt like economy and its geographical spheres of influence, including Indian Ocean and Malacca Strait. A pragmatic but more open-ended approach with China where putting troubling issues explicitly on table and stressing upon reciprocity will be the key to make it understand and deal with India on a more equal footing.

l) Information warfare/perception management is another domain that needs greater attention from Indian strategic planners. In recent months, a number of international indexes on freedom, happiness and hunger have come up, ranking India disparagingly with an explicit motivation to hit out at its credibility. There have been instances of countries like UAE, Iran, Bhutan, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Nigeria having better freedom/press/happiness rankings that it is questionable.

Also, there have been projections in global media amplifying small unfortunate incidents as minority/Muslim killings. USCIRF's annual reports on India as a nation of particular concern comprises of numerous anomalies, lies and blatant propaganda. A legal, justified tax raid on BBC in India has been publicized in western media as an open attack on press freedom and reprisal against Modi documentary by the BBC. A common social media war on twitter between netizens from India and Maldives/Bangladesh has been construed as Indian state-sponsored/directed warfare.

Unfortunate, illegal killings of three Muslim citizens in India in the last few years have been projected by western media as anti-minority but the very destruction of Islamic culture/religion, demolition of thousands of mosques all around China, hardly gets a coverage, forget the criticism. All this suggest that in the perception war, India is losing out. Though perceptions hardly change facts but they do have a bearing on investments, tourism and education for the country. India needs to develop its own information/perception strategies not only to counter myths but also to promote those that bolster its own interests in any part of the world. In this connection, the proposed international channel of DoorDarshan (Indian state TV Network) and building up of qualitative, credible indexes with support of Indian state are steps that government reportedly are working on which may offer an alternative, more credible point of view for Indian and global audiences.

Very recently, in the midst of *Operation Sindoor* and thereafter, the incessant hijacking of western media by Pakistan and China, projecting unverified, non-credible supposed losses to Indian military is another example of perception warfare where India needs to improve. It needs to be understood that such psychological games do play a significant role in promotion of one's political, commercial as well as strategic interests in global geopolitics.

India currently is at a crossroads of its post-independence journey. It needs to grow economically, secure its borders and territories while ensuring social cohesion among its growing population. Internally, it needs to create jobs, grow economically at an average GDP of not less than 7-7.5% for at least a decade and maintain amiable relations with all major powers. It also needs to be clear in demarcating and then protecting its zone of influence, both on the land as well as in the seas, which seems to have been extended beyond the south Asian region alone. It looks to be working on a creating a zone that includes south Asia to Indian Ocean and extended upto Indo-Pacific region. A significant thrust on building up of a truly powerful, extensive blue-water Indian Navy, seems to be part of this thought process. Achieving such tasks is enormous since no nation would like to compromise on its national interests and it will involve getting into others spheres of influence but India needs to find its way and do that effectively and innovatively in the coming years.