

A blueprint for a national security strategy

The new government must build on D.S. Hooda's outline



HAPPYMON JACOB

"Indian elites show little evidence of having thought coherently and systematically about national strategy... Few writings offer coherent, articulated beliefs or a clear set of operating principles for Indian strategy," wrote American think tanker George Tanham in a paper prepared for the U.S. government in 1992.

A glaring lacuna

Most Indian students of strategy and security studies rightly disagree with this rather presumptuous argument, especially since Tanham located the causes of the Indian inability to think strategically in its historical and cultural specificities. And yet it is pertinent to ask, even today, whether India thinks about strategic affairs in a systematic, consistent and coherent manner or whether its national security runs on ad hoc arrangements and 'raw wisdom'. Or is it that the political class has traditionally been too cagey about putting out a national security strategy, even a mere declaratory one as opposed to an operational one, in black and white?

It is interesting, therefore, that the Congress party recently shed its coyness about formulating a national security strategy for India. Earlier this year it tasked Lt. Gen. (ret'd) D.S. Hooda, a former Northern Army Commander, to write a strategy document which it eventually endorsed and made part of its manifesto.

In fact, there have been several attempts at formulating a national security strategy for India. According to some accounts, the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) had formulated draft national security strategy documents on four different occasions and presented them to successive governments, but the political class wouldn't bite. There has been a lingering worry in the minds of the politicians about a potential commitment trap if a national security strategy were to be put on paper.

Recently a senior member of the NSAB stated that there is indeed in existence a national security strategy of sorts, though not disclosed to the



"There have been several attempts at formulating a national security strategy for India." BSF personnel patrolling the border in Ferozepur, Punjab, in 2015.
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general public – though Gen. Hooda has said that as the Northern Army Commander, he at least had not seen the document. So, if indeed there is such a document, it is odd that one of the senior-most generals tasked with managing Kashmir and India's border with Pakistan didn't know about it. And if there isn't a strategy in place, we should be worried.

Key issues

There are some major shortcomings in India's national security architecture that must be addressed. There is a need to take a look at some of our key national security institutions and revamp their functioning. The National Security Council (NSC) set up in 1998 almost never meets, primarily because it is an advisory body, with the Cabinet Committee on Security being the executive body. If the NSC is to be made more useful, the government's allocation of business rules should be amended to give more powers to the NSC and its subordinate organisations, such as the Strategic Policy Group.

Second, the job of the National Security Adviser needs to be reimagined. Even though the NSA plays a vital role in national security, he has no legal powers as per the government's allocation of business rules. The K.C. Pant Task Force in the late 1990s had recommended the creation of an NSA with the rank of a Cabinet Minister. Over the years, the NSA's powers have increased, even though he is not accountable to Parliament. The institution of the NSA today requires more accountability

and legal formality.

More national security organisations are not the answer; fundamental structural reforms in national security planning are needed. Take the case of the recently constituted Defence Planning Committee (DPC) tasked to recommend policy measures to improve India's defence capability and preparedness, and national security in general. Not only does the DPC have too many responsibilities on its plate, it is also an advisory body. More worryingly, there is a feeling among the armed forces that by having the NSA chair the DPC, the government may have scuttled the demands to appoint a Chief of the Defence Staff, an issue the Hooda document highlights.

The Hooda document

The Congress promised Gen. Hooda that it would adopt his national security strategy document after internal consultations. The document was prepared in less than two months and in consultation with six key core group members and many domain experts. The guiding philosophy of the document is enshrined in the following sentence: "This strategy recognises the centrality of our people. We cannot achieve true security if large sections of our population are faced with discrimination, inequality, lack of opportunities, and buffeted by the risks of climate change, technology disruption, and water and energy scarcity."

This is by far the most comprehensive treatment of national security in the Indian context. The document

offers a comprehensive definition of national security ranging from challenges posed by new technologies to social unrest to inequality. At a time when national security is referred to in strictly military terms, it is heartening to see that a strategy document written by a former Army general, the man behind the 2016 surgical strikes, defines security in an out-of-the-box and inclusive manner. A glance at the key themes shows how well-designed the document is: "assuming our rightful place in global affairs", "achieving a secure neighbourhood", "peaceful resolution of internal conflicts", "protecting our people" and "strengthening our capabilities".

The key recommendations in the document are both timely and well-thought-out. On the issue of military jointmanship, it recommends that "the three services should undertake a comprehensive review of their current and future force structures to transform the army, navy and air force into an integrated warfighting force." It argues that it would take "a cultural change in the way the DRDO is currently operating" to improve domestic defence production.

While discussing emerging national security threats, the document differs with the BJP-led government's decision to set up a Defence Cyber Agency instead of a Cyber Command as was originally recommended. On the Kashmir question too, the document seems to differ with the incumbent government's muscular policy, and Gen. Hooda's wise words should be a wakeup call for everyone: "Killing terrorists is an integral part of military operations to ensure that the state does not descend into chaos. However, this is not the primary measure of success or conflict resolution. Serious efforts are required for countering radicalisation. There is a need to initiate structured programmes that bring together civil society members, family groups, educationists, religious teachers and even surrendered terrorists in an effort to roll back radicalisation."

Let's hope that this document is the beginning of a tradition in India of thinking about national security and strategy more systematically, consistently and comprehensively.

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Why China changed its stand on Masood Azhar

A well-structured India-China dialogue may go a long way in convincing Beijing to sustain pressure on Islamabad



SUJAN R. CHINOI

Masood Azhar was listed as a global terrorist on May 1 by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 1267 Committee after China withdrew its hold. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said this decision flowed from a lengthy consultative process with all the concerned parties.

Shift in position

The shift in China's position after a decade-long stalemate can be attributed to many reasons, the first being the changing geo-strategic dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region and mounting U.S.-China tensions. Against this backdrop, China's support for Azhar, whose organisation, the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), was already proscribed by the UN, would only have nudged India closer to the U.S. Second, the escalation by the U.S. of the matter in the UNSC would have compelled China to openly provide convincing reasons for its stand.

Third, instead of letting the U.S., France and the U.K. take credit for helping India, China would have seen merit in reassuring India on a key concern, which, alongside the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, had emerged as a major bugbear in bilateral ties. India's air strikes on Balakot in Pakistan had also placed China in a quandary over escalation in hostilities due to terrorist attacks in India by the JeM. China could not have been unmindful of the public sentiment in India over this issue and the fact that reassuring India could pave the way for greater convergence at the second round of the Wuhan Summit in India, possibly later this year. China would also expect such accommodation to soften India's cut-and-dried position against the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Fourth, with more terror attacks in India and the neighbourhood emanating from Pakistan, and the growing influence of Pakistan-based groups on radical elements throughout the region, China must have realised that the game was simply not worth the candle. Its continued hold would have raised

questions about its commitment to fighting global terror, and adversely impacted its image at a time when the country is projecting its "new major power diplomacy" and propounding an alternative narrative on developmental issues such as President Xi Jinping's "community of common destiny".

Any change in China's stand may have been difficult when the UN Sanctions Committee last considered the matter on March 13 because it came too soon after the Pulwama incident. As an "iron brother", China would have been loathe to let Pakistan down and endorse India's claim that Pakistan was complicit in the attack. Moreover, China would not have wanted to give other political parties in India the impression that it was aiding the BJP's electoral prospects by vacating the hold on the eve of the elections. Notably, its turnaround came after the main phases of the election were over.

Like in the case of Hafiz Saeed of the Lashkar-e-Taiba in 2009, Pakistan is most unlikely to bring Azhar to justice. The 'deep state' of Pakistan, backing him since his release from an Indian prison in 1999, will ensure that he remains safe and capable of organising attacks against India without direct attribution.

Looking forward

The next step for India would be to sustain the pressure on Pakistan to take conclusive action against terror outfits operating from its soil. China's changed position does not in any way dilute its close ties and support for Pakistan, as was reiterated by Mr. Xi in his meeting with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan during the BRI conference in Beijing before the listing. Nevertheless, China had condemned the Pulwama attack and cooperated at the Financial Action Task Force Plenary Session in Paris in ensuring that Pakistan remained on the "grey list". Significantly, it had not reacted to India's 'pre-emptive strikes'.

Post-Wuhan, India and China have embarked on a path of closer engagement. There is growing room for responding to each other's concerns. A well-structured India-China dialogue on regional and global terrorism may go a long way in convincing Beijing of the need to sustain pressure on Islamabad to act against terrorists, which is in the interest of the entire global community.

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SINGLE FILE

Rohingya repatriation

India could be a force for positive change

MEENAKSHI GANGULY



Nearly two years after they fled Myanmar following a brutal crackdown, more than 270,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh have been provided with identity cards, the United Nations said recently, to safeguard their right to voluntarily return home to Myanmar.

This is a welcome development for the Rohingya, who are considered Muslims of colonial-Indian origin by Myanmar and have thus long been denied proper citizenship rights.

The humanitarian crisis began in August 2017, when the Myanmar military reportedly responded to an attack on police posts by Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army militants in northern Rakhine State. The widespread violence in that restive region led to more than 700,000 Rohingya fleeing across the border in just over three months. Human rights agencies said that thousands were killed, rape was used as a weapon of war, and villages were burned to the ground.

An independent investigation by the UN determined that Myanmar's military chief and other leaders should be investigated and prosecuted for genocide and crimes against humanity. Although the evidence is overwhelming, Myanmar's leaders, including the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, refuse to accept the allegations, much less responsibility.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh is struggling with the ongoing influx of Rohingya refugees. Bangladesh authorities, who often said that improved conditions would only serve as a pull factor, had for long sought to block services from international humanitarian groups. That changed under public pressure when the mass influx began in August 2017, with many Bangladeshis recalling the protection and assistance they had received from India in 1971. While Dhaka may have hoped that the Rohingya would be short-term guests, Myanmar refuses to bend two years on, and the Bangladesh government's welcome is wearing thin. The 1.2 million refugees there are crammed into camps without freedom of movement and restrictions on their rights to obtain employment, education, and social services.

Under pressure from China, in January 2018, Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an agreement to repatriate refugees. However, one such attempt failed last November. "Not a single Rohingya has volunteered to return to Rakhine due to the absence of conducive environment there," the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary told the UN in March 2019.

It is likely that Myanmar will only agree to create the environment for safe and voluntary return if the costs of continued defiance become too high to bear. Thus far, veto-wielding members China and Russia have blocked action at the UN Security Council, such as an International Criminal Court referral, targeted sanctions or even a global arms embargo. India could be a force for positive change if, instead of deporting its own Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, it joined the international community to insist that Myanmar protect the Rohingya's rights and ensure their safe return.

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DATA POINT

Projections off the mark

The record of exit polls has been poor in recent Lok Sabha elections. In 2004 and 2009, pollsters overestimated the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) seat shares, while in 2014, they overestimated the United Progressive Alliance's (UPA) shares. By **Varun B. Krishnan**

Channel/Agency	NDA	UPA	NDA diff	UPA diff
AajTak-ORG-MARG	248	190	-61	29
NDTV-AC Nielsen	230-250	190-205	-53	22
Sahara-DRS	263-278	171-181	-83	43
Star News-CVoter	263-275	174-186	-82	39
Zee News-Taleem	249	176	-62	43
Actual results	187	219	-	-
Vote share %	33.3	35.4	-	-

Channel/Agency	NDA	UPA	NDA diff	UPA diff
CNN-IBN-CSDS-Lokniti	276	97	60	-39
India Today-Cicero	272	115	64	-57
News 24-Chanakya	340	70	-4	-12
Times Now-ORG	249	148	87	-90
ABP News-Nielsen	274	97	62	-39
India TV-CVoter	289	101	47	-43
NDTV-Hansa Research	279	103	57	-45
Actual results	336	58	-	-
Vote share %	38.5	23	-	-

Source: News reports

Channel/Agency	NDA	UPA	NDA diff	UPA diff
CNN IBN-DB	165-185	185-205	-16	67
Star-Nielsen	196	199	-37	63
India TV-CVoter	183-195	189-201	-30	67
Actual results	159	262	-	-
Vote share %	37.1	24.6	-	-

DB: Dainik Bhaskar

Channel/Agency	NDA	UPA	Others
Times Now-VMR	306	132	104
Republic-CVoter	287	128	127
Neta-NewsX	242	164	136
India-News	298	118	127
News18-Ipsos	336	82	124
ABP-Nielsen	277	130	135
India Today-Axis My India	339-365	77-108	69-95

*NDA diff and UPA diff: Difference between actual and predicted results

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 23, 1969

Sarabhai assails faltering nuclear policy

Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, to-day [May 22, Bombay] said the "halt and go policy" in nuclear power generation, adopted by the Planning Commission in the Draft Fourth Plan, was "really suicidal" for the country. "When the whole world is going in for nuclear energy generation in a big way, we must not falter at this point," he told a Press conference. He said India's nuclear power generation by the middle of 1972 would be 1,000 mW when the Ranapratap Sagar and the Kalpakkam plants would go into commercial production. The Planning Commission had suggested in the Draft Fourth Plan that the development of further nuclear power programme should be considered after studying the economics of operation of the Tarapur, Ranapratap Sagar and Kalpakkam plants. Dr. Sarabhai said India should have an installed nuclear power capacity of 2,000 mW in five years and 3,000 mW in less than ten years.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 23, 1919.

Co-operation in Mysore.

(From an Editorial)

The Report on the working of the co-operative movement in Mysore for the year 1917-18, just issued, contains, as usual, some matters of interest to co-operators outside the State as well as to those within it. Those who have learnt to see in Mysore rapid increase in the number of societies year after year will be somewhat disappointed this time; for, compared with the previous year, the increase in the number of societies in the year under report is not a striking feature. As a result of new registration, the number of societies newly brought into being was 141. As against this, however, must be set down the cancellation of registration of some 18 societies found to be too unfit to be allowed to exist. Owing to increased caution in the registration of societies and what appears to be the very necessary process of pruning, the net increase in the number of societies in the year under report was only 123 as against 179 in 1916-17.

POLL CALL

Strike rate

This refers to the share of seats won by a party of the overall seats it contested in an election. The BJP had an extraordinary strike rate in 2014 despite only an overall vote share of 31% because of its performance in the northern and western regions (it won 190 of the 225 seats in 10 States in the Hindi belt, which is a strike rate of 85%). The BSP, on the other hand, had a very poor strike rate (it did not win a single seat of the 503 seats it contested though it got the third largest vote share of 4.2%).

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