
Managing National Security: Threats, Challenges and Conflict Resolution

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Regional Security Environment

Though the year gone by has been relatively peaceful in South Asia — with the exception of the conflict in Afghanistan, the unstable regional security environment, India's unresolved territorial and boundary disputes with China and Pakistan and continuing internal security challenges are cause for concern. After West Asia, this region is perhaps the most trouble-prone in the world. With a history of four conflicts in 60 years and three nuclear-armed adversaries continuing to face off, South Asia has been described as a nuclear flashpoint. Hence, in view of the ongoing conflicts and the possibility of new conflagrations, in the short term, South Asia will continue to witness further turbulence.

The regional security environment in South Asia continues to be marred by Afghanistan's endless civil war despite the induction of additional troops in 2010 by the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation-International Security Assistance Force (NATO-ISAF) coalition. The situation can be characterised as a strategic stalemate. This will continue with the Taliban and the NATO forces alternately gaining local ascendancy for short durations in the core provinces of Helmand, Marja and Kandahar. The Afghan National Army (ANA) is still many years away from achieving the professional standards necessary to manage security on its own. It will, therefore, be difficult for the US to begin its planned drawdown of troops in July 2011.

Pakistan's half-hearted struggle against the remnants of the Al Qaeda and Taliban, fissiparous tendencies in Baluchistan and the Pushtun heartland,

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continuing radical extremism and creeping Talibanisation, the unstable civilian government, the floundering economy and, consequently, the nation's gradual slide towards becoming a 'failed state', pose major security challenges for the region. Unless the Pakistan Army gives up its idiosyncratic notions of seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan and fuelling terrorism in India and concentrates instead on fighting all varieties of Taliban that are threatening the cohesion of the state, the instability in Pakistan will continue.

The military stand-off along the 38th Parallel in Korea has further exacerbated the already unstable situation in East Asia caused by increasing Chinese assertiveness that is completely out of character with its stated objective of a peaceful rise. Though the international community may be able to ensure that a major conflict does not erupt again between the two Koreas, the sub-region will remain volatile unless the Chinese use their influence with North Korea to persuade it to back off from the path of confrontation. Turmoil in West Asia will continue through 2011 as Israel stubbornly refuses to halt the construction of new settlements in the West Bank and the Palestinian militias are getting increasingly restive. The collusive nuclear weapons-cum-missile development programmes of China, North Korea and Pakistan, and Iran's quest for nuclear weapons are issues of serious concern.

Iran's nuclear ambitions and the vaguely stated threats of several of its neighbours to follow suit are a major cause of potential instability in the region. Saudi Arabia, in particular, may fund Pakistan's nuclear expansion programme as a hedging strategy against the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran. Such a course of action would be a disastrous blow to international non-proliferation efforts. Sri Lanka's inability to find a lasting solution to its ethnic problems despite the comprehensive defeat of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) has serious repercussions for stability in the island nation. Bangladesh is emerging as the new hub of Islamist fundamentalist terrorism, despite the incumbent government's efforts to curb the menace, even as it struggles for the economic upliftment of its people.

It can be deduced from the recent arrests in the UK and elsewhere that international fundamentalist terrorists may succeed in launching another spectacular strike in the West. A successful strike would resurrect the Al Qaeda

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and enable it to rally its wavering cadres.

Simmering discontentment in Tibet and Xinjiang against China's repressive regime is gathering momentum and could result in an open revolt. The people's nascent movement for democracy in Myanmar and several long festering insurgencies may destabilise the military junta despite its post-election confidence. The movement for democracy could turn violent if the ruling junta continues to deny its citizens basic human rights. The continuing spillover of religious extremism and terrorism from Afghanistan is undermining regional counter-terrorism efforts. Other vitiating factors impacting regional stability in South Asia include the unchecked proliferation of small arms, being nurtured and encouraged by large-scale narcotics trafficking and its nexus with radical extremism.

India's standing as a regional power that has global power ambitions and aspires to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council has been seriously compromised by its inability to successfully manage ongoing conflicts in its neighbourhood, singly or in concert with its strategic partners. These conflicts are undermining South Asia's efforts towards socio-economic development and poverty alleviation by hampering governance and vitiating the investment climate. It appears inevitable that in 2011, the South Asian region and its extended neighbourhood will see a continuation of ongoing conflicts without major let up. In fact, the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan could deteriorate beyond the ability of the international community to control it effectively.

External and Internal Threats

The key geo-strategic challenges in Southern Asia emanate from the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and on the Af-Pak border; unresolved territorial disputes between India and China, and India and Pakistan; and, the almost unbridled scourge of radical extremism that is sweeping across the strategic landscape. In May 1998, India and Pakistan had crossed the nuclear Rubicon and declared themselves states armed with nuclear weapons. Tensions are inherent in the

possession of nuclear weapons by neighbours with a long history of conflict. The latest manifestation of this long-drawn conflict is the 20-year-old state-sponsored 'proxy war' waged by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)-controlled mercenary terrorists against the Indian state.

While there has been some nuclear sabre-rattling between India and Pakistan in the past, particularly during the Kargil conflict, the two nations have never come even remotely close to a situation of deterrence breakdown. The "ugly stability" that is prevailing can be attributed primarily to India's unwavering strategic restraint in the face of grave provocation, democratic checks and balances in its policy processes and tight civilian control over its nuclear forces. However, the Pakistan Army, which also controls the country's nuclear arsenal, has lost India's trust after the Kargil conflict and the terrorist strikes at Mumbai that were engineered by the ISI. It is capable of once again stepping up trans-Line of Control (LoC) terrorism or even engendering a Kargil-like situation that could escalate to a major war.

India's border with China has been relatively more stable than that with Pakistan. However, China is in physical occupation of 38,000 sq km of Indian territory in Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), and China claims the entire Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh (96,000 sq km) in the northeast, particularly the Tawang tract. Even the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has not been demarcated on the ground and on military maps. Recently, China has exhibited unprecedented assertiveness in its diplomacy and military posture. Frequent transgression of the LAC by the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) Border Guards could lead to a local border incident. Until the territorial dispute between the two countries is resolved satisfactorily, another border conflict cannot be ruled out even though the probability is quite low.

The nuclear, missile and military hardware nexus between China and Pakistan, and China's increasing diplomatic, political and military assertiveness towards India at the tactical level, continue to underline the existential military threat from both these countries. China is engaged in the strategic encirclement of

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India by assiduously wooing Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan among India's land neighbours to degrade India's influence and following a 'string of pearls' strategy to eventually acquire naval bases around the Indian peninsula in the northern Indian Ocean Region for maritime domination. Hence, China poses a long-term strategic challenge to India as a geo-political competitor and rival for markets and energy security in Asia.

China does not recognise India as a state armed with nuclear weapons and demands that India should go back to a non-nuclear status in terms of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1172 and, hence, refuses to discuss nuclear confidence building measures (CBMs) and nuclear risk reduction measures (NRRMs) with India. There is also a collusive nexus between China and Pakistan for the development of nuclear weapons, nuclear-capable missiles and military hardware. Most analysts in India believe that this nexus will lead to India having to face a two-front situation during any future conflict and India must, therefore, evolve a two-front military strategy.

The prevailing security environment in Southern Asia is not conducive to long-term strategic stability even though in the short-term there is no cause for major concern. India is developing robust military capabilities and is in the process of upgrading its military strategy against China from dissuasion to deterrence. In the field of nuclear deterrence, India is moving steadily forward towards the deployment of the third leg of its triad, i.e. nuclear-powered submarines armed with submarine-launched nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles (SSBN with SLBMs). This will give India genuine nuclear deterrence capability so as to prevent deterrence breakdown and reduce the risk of nuclear exchanges in any future conflict.

India's internal security environment has been vitiated by Pakistan's two-decade-old proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir, continuing insurgency in several of India's northeastern states, the rising tide of Maoist or Naxalite (left wing) extremism in Central India and the new wave of urban terrorism, which peaked with the dastardly attacks in Mumbai on November 26, 2008. Besides central and state government paramilitary and police forces, the Indian Army has been deployed in large numbers to gain control over internal uprisings, some of

which are supported, sponsored and militarily aided by inimical foreign powers, especially the Pakistan Army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). However, India's fightback is haphazard and lacks coherence, both in the formulation of a comprehensive internal security strategy and its successful execution. The acquisition and dissemination of intelligence for preventing terrorist strikes are also patently flawed.

Conflict Resolution

The ultimate aim of a nation's armed forces is to deter war; fighting and winning is necessary only if deterrence breaks down. As the primary underlying cause of future conventional conflict on the Indian subcontinent is likely to be unresolved territorial and boundary disputes, it is necessary to speedily resolve the existing disputes. Despite over one dozen rounds of talks between India's national security adviser and China's vice foreign minister, it has not been possible to make major headway in the resolution of the India-China territorial dispute. In fact, it has not even been possible to demarcate the LAC on the ground and on military maps so as to prevent frequent complaints about intrusions and transgressions and to minimise the probability of an armed clash between patrols. China's intransigence and its recent claims to Tawang have led to a stalemate in negotiations. On its part, India must continue to impress on the Chinese leadership the importance of the early resolution of the territorial and boundary dispute. Simultaneously, India must continue its efforts to improve border infrastructure and create adequate offensive operations capability to deter another round of conflict.

Resolution of the dispute with Pakistan over J&K is equally complex as, besides India and Pakistan, the people of J&K – straddling the LoC – are also party to the conflict. While some progress had been made during the Musharraf regime, the general's troubles at home led him to back off. A ray of hope had emerged once again with the installation of an elected civilian government in Pakistan but the terror strikes in Mumbai in November 2008 put paid to the rapprochement process, which is still in limbo despite recent talks between the foreign secretaries. Neither government has made any effort to mould public opinion for a possible solution. Entrenched political and religious constituencies on both sides are likely to noisily stall any understanding that the two governments might reach. Hence, it is difficult to be optimistic about the early resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

In stark contrast with the difficulties of conflict resolution on the external front, the last couple of years have seen substantial progress in resolving internal conflicts. The central government's ceasefire with the Nagas, which has now held fairly well

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for over a decade even while internecine quarrels among the Nagas have continued unabated, has led to tangible progress in negotiations with both the Issak-Muivah and the Khaplang factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and there is cause for optimism about the early resolution of the long drawn conflict. The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in Assam has begun negotiations with the central government without any pre-conditions except for the break-away military wing led by Paresh Barua who is said to be taking shelter in Myanmar and is getting covert support from the Chinese. It is to be hoped that the ULFA leadership will act in a statesman-like manner for the good of the people of Assam rather than continue to pursue power for its own sake.

There is less cause for optimism regarding resolution of the conflict being waged by Maoist or Naxalite insurgents in almost 220 districts of central India. The leadership of the Communist Party of India (CPI) (Maoist) seeks to one day fly its flag from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi and is pursuing its aim methodically and systematically. Despite the home minister's offer for talks, it continues to indulge in wanton acts of violence, kidnapping and extortion. A comprehensive three-pronged strategy that simultaneously emphasises security, development and governance – with skilfull perception management – is necessary to defeat the menace of left wing extremism (LWE).

Managing National Security

The first and foremost item on the government's defence and national security agenda should be the formulation of a comprehensive national security strategy (NSS), including internal security. The NSS should be formulated after carrying out an inter-departmental, inter-agency, multi-disciplinary strategic defence review. Such a review must take the public into confidence and not be conducted behind closed doors. Like in most other democracies, the NSS should be signed by the prime minister, who is the head of government, and must be placed on the table of Parliament and released as a public document. Only then will various stakeholders take ownership of the strategy and work unitedly to achieve its aims and objectives.

The armed forces are now in the final year of the 11th Defence Plan (2007-12) and it has not yet been approved by the government. The government has also not approved the long-term integrated perspective plan (LTIPP 2007-22) formulated by HQ Integrated Defence Staff (IDS). Without these essential approvals, defence procurement is being undertaken through *ad hoc* annual procurement plans, rather than being based on duly prioritised long-term plans that are designed to systematically enhance India's combat potential. These are serious lacunae as effective defence planning cannot be undertaken in a policy void. The government must commit itself to supporting long-term defence plans or else defence modernisation will continue to lag and the growing military capabilities gap with China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) will assume ominous proportions. This can be done only by reviving the dormant National Security Council (NSC) as defence planning is in the domain of the NSC and not the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), which deals with current and near term threats and challenges and reacts to emergent situations.

Managing National Security: Priority Measures

- Formulate a comprehensive national security strategy (NSS), after undertaking a strategic defence review.
- Approve LTIPP 2007-22, the long-term integrated perspective plan of the armed forces, and the ongoing Defence Plan 2007-12, now in its final year.
- The defence budget must be enhanced to 3.0 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for meaningful defence modernisation.
- The long-pending defence procurement plans such as artillery modernisation, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and submarines and modern fighter aircraft must be hastened.
- Modernisation plans of the central paramilitary and police forces must also be given the attention that they deserve.
- The government must immediately appoint a Chief of Defence Staff to head the defence planning function and provide single-point military advice to the Cabinet Committee on Security.
- Anomalies created by the Sixth Pay Commission have led to a civil-military divide and must be redressed early, including acceptance of the ex-Servicemen's legitimate demand for one rank-one pension.
- A National War Memorial must be constructed at a suitable high-visibility spot in New Delhi to honour the memory of all those soldiers, sailors and airmen who have made the supreme sacrifice in the service of India and to boost the morale of the armed forces.

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The inability to speedily conclude major defence contracts to enhance national security preparedness in the face of growing threats and challenges, exemplifies the government's inability to grapple with systemic flaws in the procurement procedures and processes. Despite having formulated the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) and the Defence Production Policy (DPrP), the government has been unable to reduce bureaucratic red tape and defence modernisation continues to stagnate. It is difficult to understand why the budgetary allocations earmarked on the capital account for the modernisation of the armed forces should continue to be surrendered year after year, with complete lack of accountability. The financial

year (FY) 2010-11 has brought some encouraging news as the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has managed to fully utilise all the funds that were allocated on the capital account.

While internal security challenges are gradually gaining prominence, preparations for conventional conflict must not be neglected. Major defence procurement decisions must be made quickly. The army is still without towed and self-propelled 155mm howitzers for the plains and the mountains and urgently needs new utility helicopters, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) as also to acquire weapons and equipment for counter-insurgency operations. The navy has been waiting for long for the *Vikramaditya* (*Admiral Gorshkov*) aircraft carrier, which is being refurbished in a Russian shipyard at exorbitant cost and with operationally unacceptable time overruns. Construction of the indigenous air defence ship has also been delayed. The plan of the air force to acquire 126 multi-mission, medium-range combat aircraft in order to maintain its edge over the regional air forces is stuck in the procurement quagmire, even as the light combat aircraft (LCA) project continues to lag inordinately behind schedule. All three Services need a large number of light and medium lift helicopters. India's nuclear forces require the Agni-III missile and nuclear-powered submarines with suitable ballistic missiles to acquire genuine deterrent capability. The armed forces do not have a truly integrated command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, information, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4I2SR)

system for network-centric warfare, which will allow them to synergise the combat capabilities. The approach followed is still a platform-centric one despite the demonstrated advantages of switching to a network-centric approach.

All of these high-priority acquisitions will require extensive budgetary support. With the defence budget languishing at less than 2.0 per cent of India's GDP (1.83 per cent of the projected GDP for FY 2011-12) – compared with China's 3.5 per cent and Pakistan's 4.5 per cent plus US military aid – it will not be possible for the armed forces to undertake any meaningful modernisation. The funds available on the capital account at present are inadequate to suffice even for the replacement of obsolete weapons systems and obsolescent equipment that are still in service well beyond their useful life cycles. The central police and paramilitary

forces (CPMFs) also need to be modernised and better trained as they are facing increasingly greater threats while continuing to be equipped with sub-standard weapons.

The government must also immediately appoint a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or a permanent chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee to provide single-point advice to the CCS on military matters. Any further dithering on this key structural reform in higher defence management on the grounds of the lack of political consensus and the inability of the armed forces to agree on the issue will be extremely detrimental to India's interests in the light of the dangerous developments taking place in India's neighbourhood. The logical next step would be to constitute tri-Service integrated theatre commands to synergise the capabilities of individual Services. International experience shows that such reform has to be imposed from the top down and can never work if the government keeps waiting for it to come about from the bottom up.

The softer issues that do not impinge immediately on planning and preparation for meeting national security challenges must never be ignored as these can have adverse repercussions on the morale of the officers and men in uniform in the long term. The numerous anomalies created by the

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implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission report must be speedily resolved. In fact, the ham-handed handling of this issue has led to a dangerous “them versus us” civil-military divide and the political leadership must make it a point to bridge this gap quickly.

The ex-Servicemen too have had a raw deal and have been surrendering their medals and holding fasts to get justice for their legitimate demand of “one rank-one pension.” One rank-one pension is an idea whose time has come and it must be implemented without further delay and without appointing any more committees of bureaucrats to look into the issue. While a Department of Ex-servicemen’s Welfare has been created in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in keeping with the United Progressive Alliance’s (UPA’s) Common Minimum Programme, till recently there wasn’t a single ex-Serviceman in it. Such measures do not generate confidence among serving soldiers and retired veterans in the civilian leadership. Finally, rather unbelievably, India is still without a National War Memorial.