India's National Security Policy-Making Prism

Gautam Sen

A national security strategy is an integral part of a nation-state's quest to safeguard its national interest. Today, nation-states are the unit of analysis of international relations amongst them, bilaterally and multilaterally, at regional and global levels. National interest involves the securitisation of a nation from external and internal threats, by synergising with foreign policy-making to ensure that diplomacy plays a complementary as well as supporting role to meet the goals and objectives of national interest. This synergisation leads to the evolution of a structured architecture of the national security policy-making prism which is institutionalised in a way to incorporate the ideas and role of all the stakeholders in a democratic form of governance.

India as the largest democracy in the world has proved its structural, intellectual, moral and social efficacy of a functional democracy over the past 70 years. India's national security policy-making, though it has been disjointed, has remained functional in times of crisis.[1] Therefore, the problems related to India's national security policy-making require an indepth study of the problems of the cultural and civilisational preconditions in a multi-dimensional perspective in which the various components of social science disciplines must come together for the formulation of a unified theoretical orientation. The problems of

Professor **Gautam Sen** is Emeritus Professor, Management Institute for Leadership and Excellence (MILE), Pune.

national security for a country like India which has experienced a series of catastrophes from within and a continuing threat from without, has to be formulated in terms of larger goals and aspirations to which this civilisational community has committed itself. In essence, India can think of three main objectives: first, national stability and integrity; second, social political and economic progress; and third, peace and stability in terms of India's relationships with other states, regionally and globally. Therefore, India's national security as an essential component to securitise its national interest must be seen in terms of these larger goals. If this may be called the cultural dimension of the problems of national security, then one has to look at the political perspectives as well. Here we have to consider a complex interaction between our perception of our neighbours beyond the borders as well as the larger major powers, and their perceptions and assessments of our situation and our objectives.

It is within this matrix of relationships that the specific goals of India's defence policy will get structured. The cultural and political aspects of the problems create a texture of tasks and priorities of decision-making and possible options for actions. The actualisation of objectives as modulated and structured requires an adequate process of institutionalisation ranging from the economic to the administrative and legal preconditions. This institutionalisation of the national security efforts creates further problems and difficulties.[2] Hence, all three dimensions viz. the cultural, socio-political and institutional enter in a complex interaction calling for skills and patterns of leadership at all levels of the problems. Therefore, we have a final dimension of how various forms of leadership may be required to respond creatively to the complexities of the problem. In this whole endeavour, the role of all the stakeholders as given in the schematic diagram of the national security policy-making prism, becomes normatively essential. Hence, a clear articulation of the various facets of the situation, their complex relationships and also a sharp awareness

of the possible contributions, tensions and pressures that must be overcome, as well as the contribution of scholars in the cultural and philosophical disciplines will be needed to examine the normative aspects of the problems of security in the light of the ideals to which India is committed e.g. neo-liberal dimensions of non-alignment, national security, social justice and global peace.

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Neither Nehru nor Narendra Modi has been associated with an institutionalised doctrinal approach to foreign policy-making. One can, however, see the use of the term Gujral Doctrine or the newfound truncated version called the Manmohan Singh Doctrine.[3] The theoretical moorings of India's foreign policy-making become more disjointed when one takes into account the joke that circulated amongst the graduate students pursuing their doctoral work towards the end of the last century. It stated, "Gandhiji was convinced that there were moral solutions to political problems, Nehru considered pursuing idealism as a solution to all political problems, Indira Gandhi thought that there were political solutions to moral problems and Rajiv Gandhi was convinced that technology could solve all problems – political and moral."

However, scholars from the national and international arenas must recognise on a serious note that attention to India's foreign policy-making has attracted major intellectual inputs. The most preferred way of approaching the seventy years of India's independent history will be to create time capsule modules and then observe how each section of the historical periods contributed towards the identification of the theoretical moorings of India's foreign policy-making. In 2017, India would be celebrating the 70th year of independence, and the implications of foreign and national security perspectives operating from within the complex mosaic of International Relations (IR) in the

post World War II period, which has seen the end of classical bipolarity and the Cold War, the emergence of globalisation and the rise of terrorism, will be evident. The emerging world order is characterised by economic and political interdependence and has virtually made redundant the traditional understanding of international relations in its functional modality.[4] Hence, covering the past 70 years has to be divided into two neat parts. One, the Nehruvian period; and the second, the post Nehruvian period till date with the emergence of Narendra Modi, who dawned on the scene just a little more than two years ago, in 2014.

It is, indeed, a daunting task to encapsulate the understanding of India's rise to a global status of power, both militarily and economically, within the ultra -short confines of the space of this article – an issue area on which volumes have been written, with vigorous intellectual inputs from scholars from all over the world. It will be prudent to observe that the rise of the economic and political power of India and China has been spectacular despite India's feeble foreign policy.[5]

However, India has not undertaken any step in the past 70 years to institutionalise the national security policy-making process, nor has it defined the incorporation of stakeholders and their role. Just as the foreign policy-makers are insulated from outside influence, the makers and deliberators of the national security policy decisions remain highly individualistic, hostage to those who hold the key position as National Security Adviser (NSA) and have the ears of the Prime Minister. There are hardly any publicly accepted inputs from non-partisan strategic planners or experts belonging to think-tanks, the academia or public intellectuals to the government in the real sense.[6] This, when compounded with the lack of an institutionalised mechanism to cull out a coherent foreign policy, has resulted in a lethal combination of personal perceptions based on strong opinions being resorted to by both the political elites and the bureaucracy to frame the foreign policy agenda, goals and objectives by successive

governments who held constitutional powers to administer, rather than govern, India.

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The National Security Policy-Making Prism: The Indian Context

Any discussion on the national security policy-making prism has to take into consideration the following.

Historical Reality

On gaining independence in 1947, India inherited many disadvantages. Despite carrying the accumulated baggage of misuse over the centuries, it had one natural advantage: of gaining a resurgent nationalism on achieving independence in 1947. One should not fail to note that India had been a subject nation for centuries, without experiencing the status of a nation-state or the culture of nationhood. India's diversity, its multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-ethnic characteristics were greatly derided as well as destroyed and literally shut down. India also faced the consequences of servitude and the humiliation of military defeats at the hands of invaders from outside, over centuries. Interestingly, India became subservient to its inherited partitioned geography, which created Pakistan. This aspect led to the unending interpretation of its territorial integrity by outside powers to the extent of being internationalised by the members of international organisations. Indian history and historical traditions became bardic, mainly subaltern, remembered from time to time more romantically and emotionally in a mythological way, where the monuments created in the past by some of Indian heroes are seen as historical sites and never as a inspiration, to be carried forward in an incremental force to produce nationalism. In the pre-independence period, Indian displayed a strange fixity on the battles of Panipat, or the exploits of Shivaji, Tipu Sultan, Rana Sanga or Porus—something

that is hardly relevant today. These historical events have hardly served as building blocks to evolve any basis of a strategic culture in the post independence India. Paradoxically, on gaining independence, India has attempted a more ambitious and modern, less medieval, and less occidental, nationalism.

Conceptually, the Indian political class, as leaders of the largest democracy, even at the time of independence, committed an unpardonable error in searching for the sustaining roots of Indian nationhood in alien idioms, values and norms. The acceptance of the geographical division of undivided India, as a result of the political blunder committed by the Indian political leadership and such decision-making influenced by the outgoing British Raj, has created today the crisis of identity of the nation-state's nomenclature which has remained undefined: Bharat, Hindustan or India. While the moral and psychological momentum of the freedom movement carried on till the disastrous military setback in 1962, thanks to the idealism of Nehru and the illiteracy of Krishna Menon on matters military, India dissipated the high moral and practical aspects of nationalism to guide the destiny of independent India. This, coupled with the confusion created by Gandhian pacifism, compounded by the initiating of non-alignment as a foreign policy tool to address the hard realities of *real politik* played out by the superpowers during the Cold War period and the absurdity of rewriting non-alignment as non-alignment 2.0 as late as in 2013 by a group of public intellectuals, in collusion with some of the top bureaucrats responsible to craft India's strategic policies, reduced India's strategic thinking to irrelevance by the end of the term of the last government in office in 2014.[7] Earlier, in 1990-91, Jaswant Singh noted the stark reality of Indian thinking and assessment on military matters in the following way: "We thought that all that warfare and strategy were about individual valour and bravery; we thought our soldiers are the best in the world (yes, they are, but is that all?) We thought besides, 'What does India, well meaning India have to fear from any quarter'?"

To my mind, this was, in turn, both a consequence and a cause. This mentality was the consequence of the failure to evolve an Indian state, and became the cause, in turn, failing to do so even after independence. Also, the defining catalyst in the evolution of nation-states in the West, the industrial revolution, had entirely missed India; our historical experience was, thus, altogether different. But we did not recognise that perhaps, therefore, with no inheritance of strategic thought, with our land vivisected geographically, with scarce incentives for conceptualising independently such a thought, with our political leadership either ignorant or unconcerned or both, an evolution of this irreplaceable ingredient remained limited in the extreme…That is why conclusions such as those of George Tanham, widely distributed throughout the international strategic community, did not seem to greatly surprise or even pain anyone in India. Nor did it result in any other reaction, even one of correction. The implications, however, of this seeming inability of people of great antiquity and cultural resilience are grave and cannot be escaped… Wars, historians have noted, are decided by three factors: the terrain, the difference in the levels of armament technology; and the character, attitude, and approach of the contending sides. The terrain is a given, and technology can be improved, but the last cannot be easily remedied. And this last has been India's main deficiency and principle reason for the lack of any intelligible national strategic thought.

That India till 1995 did not have a declared defence policy but only guidelines is evident from Jaswant Singh's address entitled *What Constitutes National Security in a Changing World Order? India's Strategic Thought*, published as a CASI Occasional Paper, June 06, 1998. The relevant part of the publication is appended below:

> There is a document called the Operational Directives. It is a fairly comprehensive paper, which is issued from the Defence Secretary to the three Chiefs of Staff. It seeks to bring out as clearly as possible, under the

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given circumstances, the threat situation which has been visualised in consultation not only with the three Services but the various agencies, the Ministry of External Affairs, and when necessary, with the Home Ministry in consultation with the Prime Minister's Office and, finally, it is approved by the Defence Minister. This document has been in existence for a considerable period.

We found on closer examination that the contents of this document required considerable change because of the enormous change that has taken place or is taking place not only in our immediate vicinity but all round. We have, in the past year or so, been getting the views, comments, and perceptions of the three Services, and have prepared a fresh document which has been very closely examined by the various concerned authorities in the government. We found that there is a large number of areas where we were not in agreement. We set up a group of senior officers to sit together and come up with a debated view on the basic minimum definition of what the country perceives as existing or emerging threats. That document is virtually finalised, and has to now go to the higher echelons. Now if you were to ask, is this the defence policy? I would not be able to say that the answer is in the affirmative because India's defence policy, to the extent that I can venture to make a statement, on it, from 1947 onwards—more precisely from 1950 onwards—has been basically a policy to defend our territory, our sovereignty and our freedom, and no more than that.

From the above exposition, it can be clearly inferred that for the first 50 years after India's independence, the political leadership made

utterances on defence policy not through a policy document but as guidelines produced by the bureaucracy, without any inputs from the Indian intellectual community at large, or various stakeholders in a transparent way. There has only been talk but no will to implement a robust defence policy or a record of any strategy for national security, nor any attempt to define India's national interest. Even today, there is no official enunciation of a defence policy of India by the government, no official document regarding a national security strategy and no White Paper on defence strategy like those published by the US, UK, China, Australia or many other countries.

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The Indian Dilemma

Since the beginning of the Cold War, India suffered from three shortcomings: (1) Nehru's relegating the economics of the market to a minor position in diplomacy; (2) his inability to understand the inevitable onslaught of the potential power of an information age in the making; (3) the long period of Nehru's leadership as Prime Minister. Devoid of the realist approach to the world order, the Nehruvian vision resulted in the incorporation of a world view that was based on the premise that there were only moral solutions to political problems. Translated into actual implementation, India incorporated central planning and state ownership in all the strategic sectors of defence production and social welfare, including education, under the garb of a mixed capitalistic economy. The private sector, thus, remained confined to consumer oriented consumable products production, which accounted for less than 30 percent of the total outlay for national development.

The private sector in this process lost the ability to have any stake related to national security or partnership in any form of decision-making

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on national security. There were no experts who could agree to disagree with Nehru publicly either within the ruling party or its political adversaries, and survive. While Y B Chavan was a classic example of neutralisation by the then political architects, J R D Tata became the symbol of the insensitivity of the government towards the private sector. National interest in the post Nehru era was more or less ill defined by politicians, and pursued by an unwieldy bureaucracy which perpetuated the "licence raj". The entire period of the Cold War, thus, saw the primacy of strategic policy-making based on privileged information on a need to know basis. India fell into the trap of relying on bureaucratic outlooks and perceptions and being ever suspicious of any free thinking by any non-governmental individual or organisation. So much so, that even the Services chiefs of the armed forces were seldom consulted. The sharing of information, mundane or otherwise, was a taboo and the private entrepreneurs were viewed as entities who were only interested in profit-making and, hence, not patriotic enough to safeguard national interests.

The only organisation, which was not government owned, due to the Constitution, and driven by the right to the freedom of speech was the national print media. Paradoxically, one comes across indirect evidence that the country was forced to be deprived of paper used for printing newspapers though there was adequate technology available to manufacture the same in the country. This was to ensure that the size of newspapers was controlled to ensure limited writings, which would represent differing viewpoints, critically examining issues and perspectives on national as well as human security. Coupled with a lack of information

related to strategic matters, the bureaucracy and political leadership ensured that they remained in power by denying information, which could be the basis of a national debate on strategic perspectives. As is well known, the newsprint paper was imported and rationed under strict supervision. Even radio and television were under state supervision.

Much has changed today and there is hope and optimism in the air, as the participation of agencies other than the state on security and the discourse on strategy has increased. Decentralisation of empowerment to 'think' has occurred. The media has taken centre-stage to act as a vigilante, and information is available to the people. Publications and writings on security matters have virtually exploded. Various commissions have taken centre-stage and the government has tacitly decided to leave certain areas of its involvement which is really none of its business to pursue, ranging from running hotels, as it did in the past, to imparting professional education, with the Information Technology (IT) sector as a prime example. As private universities are knocking on the door, even the Railways have started showing profits, and announcing reward points, while Brookings, Carnegie, Oxford and similar institutions are seeking intellectual partnerships with private think-tanks and academic institutions where the government representatives are in attendance to learn and change their mindsets of the past. The success stories of the Mittals and Ambanis at both international and national levels, and institutions of higher education to attract the best of minds for management and research, are evidence of the stake that the private sector will have in strategic areas of production and marketing. International relations and strategic partnerships in security issues will have strong economic ties as has been demonstrated in the recent developments in the Indo-US nuclear cooperation in the civil and military domains. Both the scientists and the military have given valuable inputs for the government to act upon to forge a historic breakthrough which would have been well nigh impossible in the Cold War period. A definite role has been played by the media which has employed a number of former

academics from institutes of higher education who are now working for the media contributing studied writings, and conducting well informed talk shows. As a matter of fact, the media has already started outsourcing strategic issue related debates on human security on a regular basis in which the academics as well as the political party spokespersons find their rightful place, demonstrating a new culture of protest as well as critical evaluation of policies on strategic and human security matters.

In Conclusion

There is a definite impact of neo-realism in India's approach to galvanise the national security policy-making strategy, supported by strategic thinking, wherein the culture of strategic thinking has perceptively changed to become more realistic due to the participation of a variety of individuals, organisations and the private sector. The corporate sector giants have found a stake in national security affairs to safeguard their business interests in major areas like energy, environment and intellectual property rights. Institutes of higher education have been sensitised to articulate issues on national security affairs through the conceptual lenses of various social science disciplines, using rigorous research methodologies documented with impeccable empirical evidence. We are almost seeing the demise of the narrative analysis undertaken by the social science discipline pursued for the last 50 years, as a greater variety of researchers belonging to the scientific community has started taking interest in articulating issues on "national security". The establishment of the first 'National Centre of Strategic Studies" in an Indian University by the University Grants Commission (UGC), the ongoing endeavour over the years by the armed forces to establish the first National Defence University, and similar efforts to create strategic studies institutes by the Indian Police Services, the three wings of the armed forces and revamping of government supported think-tanks are indicative of a very healthy trend. It will not be long before these efforts will be brought to fruition as India needs studied

inputs for developing a strategic culture to enable it to become a part of the knowledge society and global strategic equations. It appears that the long-awaited shift from the habit of justifying our national security and foreign policy formulation will be replaced by policies framed by rational understanding of the international system and communicated to the international community by impeccable intellectual acumen. Lastly, we must recognise the Indian Diaspora, which has started influencing the emerging strategic cultural thinking in India from outside in a significant way. India is standing at the cross-roads of transformation where the institutes of higher education have to take the lead to bridge the gap between the concepts of human security and the strategic culture of the 20st century strategic imperatives. It is here that it becomes important to brainstorm and produce a roadmap for India, keeping in mind its cultural and civilisational praxis.

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Strengthening the national security architecture will be possible if the *triad* of defence and strategic studies, defence studies and analyses, and national security policy-making become interdependent organically, intellectually, professionally and systemically.[8] It also needs to be emphasised that "doctrine" as a term is loosely used. Doctrine is the crystallisation of concepts that in due course has the potential to yield policies. Also, there is an urgent need to compile a suitable lexicon of terms to be used in the domain of security and strategic studies. If India has to play its rightful role in global politics as a major power, then it is essential for it to develop world class human resources specialised in national security affairs.

Notes

1. One specific reason for India's feeble foreign policy is the structure of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and the role it has played since 1947. See Manjari Chatterjee Miller, "India's Feeble Foreign Policy: A Would -Be Great Power Resists Its Own Rise," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2013; also see, Bharat Karnard, "India's Foreign Policy: The Foreign Hand — Has India Outsourced Foreign Policy to American Think-Tanks?" *Open Magazine*, April 29, 2016; Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "Shifts and Changes in India's Foreign and Security Policy Under Modi," available at http://www.iiss.org/en/iiss%20voices/blogsections/iiss-voices-2015-dda3/july -2632/shifts-and-changes-7c92; also see, PM Kamath, "Nehru's Foreign Policy, Flawed and All," *The Free Press Journal*, November 26, 2014. For referring to a complete compilation of India's foreign policy documents, see the compiled ten volumes by Avtar Singh, *India's Foreign Relations Documents* (New Delhi: Public Diplomacy Division, Ministry of External Affairs, 2011).
2. Gautam Sen, "Institutionalising National Security Policy-Making in India," *Issue Brief*, No. 81, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, July 2016.
3. Like Panchsheel, the Gujral Doctrine enshrined five principles; for related discussion, see, "Essential Tenets of Our Foreign Policy," *Mainstream*, January 15, 1997, quoted by Usha Thakkar and Mangesh Kulkarni, eds. *India in World Affairs: Towards the 21st Century*, (Mumbai: Himalaya Publishing House, 1999) p. 77; also see, Sanjay Baru, "The Singh Doctrine," *The Indian Express*, November 06, 2013.
4. Joseph Nye, *Understanding International Conflict: An Introduction to Theory and History* (New York: Harper & Collins, 1993).
5. An excellent exposition of the lack of long-term foreign policy planning is attributed to "New Delhi's dysfunctional foreign policy bureaucracy". National security policy-making has been totally dominated by former Foreign Service officers in their post-retirement incarnation. This has been recorded in Miller, n. 1.
6. Sen, n. 2.
7. The notion of non-alignment, or whatever was left, saw its demise when a group of public intellectuals tried to resurrect it in 2012. See Sunil Khilani, Rajiv Kumar et al., eds., *NON-ALIGNMENT 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy For India in the Twenty-First Century*, (2012). The publication does not indicate the name or the place of the printers nor was it placed on sale. However, it records, "The views, findings and recommendations of this document are the product of collective deliberation by an independent group of analysts and policy-makers: Sunil Khilnani, Rajiv Kumar, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Lt Gen Prakash Menon (Retd), Nandan Nilekani, Srinath Raghavan, Shyam Saran, and Siddharth Varadarajan. The group's activities were administratively supported by the National Defence College and Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi." For related comments on this see, Gautam Sen, Presidential Address, National Seminar on Nonalignment 2.0, Department of Civics & Politics, University of Mumbai, January 21-22, 2013.
8. Sen, n. 2.