

# **Indian National Security Management**

**K.Subrahmanyam**

The debate about the need for a national security adviser eleven years after the office came into existence highlights the inadequate understanding about the concept of national security in India. For the first time in history India has started growing economically at 8 per cent. The nation has around 1.2 billion population and it is expected that in the next three decades India will become the world's most populous country. There are also reasonable predictions that in the next twenty years India will be the third biggest market and the third biggest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the world. This rise of India, unlike the rise of all other great powers (except US) is taking place after India adopted democratic form of government. All other great powers rose before they became democracies. Therefore unlike in other cases, including the contemporary case of China, the rise of India does not cause the kind of international concern which marked the rise of other great powers. Since the dominant value system in the world is democracy and India is one, there is at present a significant amount of goodwill for the rise of India in the international system.

However it will be a grievous mistake to take it for granted that India's further advancement will be obstacle and resistance free and there are no hostile forces which would like to disrupt and defeat this great human endeavour of eliminating poverty from one fifth of mankind and establishing the biggest democratic, secular, pluralistic and progressive state in history. Religious and ideological extremism, failing states in our vicinity, organized crime, bandit political chieftains who want to carve out their own fiefdoms and rival nondemocratic great power which wants to put India down are all posing threats and challenges to this grand effort of uplifting one fifth of mankind. To pilot the Indian nation state past the challenges posed by these adverse factors is the national security management problem of the country. Unfortunately most of our elite and national security establishments have not developed an adequate understanding of the complexity or magnitude of the problem. While the Prime Minister of India has the responsibility to steer the nation towards this objective of building the most populous, democratic, pluralistic and secular state of the world, he needs dedicated staff to support him in this effort. This is what the National Security Council and National Security Adviser are about.

The implementation machinery to progress towards the grand objective is no doubt the cabinet, the Armed forces and security services, bureaucracy, the scientific establishments and the entire private sector, the industrial, agricultural and the services. Mobilising all their efforts and directing them towards the great goal is the challenge of governance before this country. There should be a clear understanding of the distinction between the implementation and planning and management functions. An innovative planner and efficient manager has to look ahead, assess the likely developments in the international sphere and carefully plan his strategy in broad framework to avoid or reduce damage to his further progress because of the adverse factors mentioned earlier, and his future advances with a view to maximize his gains, exploiting the favourable

factors. This management function in respect of national security has to be carried out at the topmost leadership level—the Prime Minister and his core staff. This is a new experience for India and has not so far been attempted. This is the heart of the national security management process. There is not even awareness in the country that we are engaged in this gigantic task.

The most important requirement in this management effort is both the awareness of the current situation and a realistic assessment about the future possibilities - short, medium and long term at the international level. On the basis of the assessments, detailed steps will have to be specifically planned to meet the likely challenges and exploit the factors favourable to the nation by the concerned ministries. The assessments of the current and future situations should be disseminated within the entire government. There should be encouragement to challenge the assumptions and findings.

While that will be a continuous process, planning for the future will be on the basis of the consensus within the government. The assessments and planning will have to be regularly reviewed and shortfalls in preparations identified for rectification. This will be the task of the national security adviser. His responsibility is stupendous enough without saddling him with various executive functions. Till now the NSAs have not looked at their role in this light and mostly concentrated on day to day problems.

Since 1998 India has developed a new self-awareness and confidence about itself. They had their origin in the economic reforms, initiated in 1991, the nuclear and missile programmes of the earlier Prime ministers, the IT prowess of India and the achievements of the Indian diaspora in the US. Even as India's progress began on economic and technological fronts it also came under Jihadi left-extremist and ethnic secessionist threats. It also faces the challenge of an increasingly assertive China. Our border infrastructure and our intelligence collection and assessment capabilities are inadequate to meet the threats and challenges. Our armed forces, para-military forces and our police forces require urgent modernisation. Our governance needs to be made effective and the delivery system of goods and services for the common man should be efficient and corruption free. Our education and health care have to be made universal. The higher education, especially technological one and our R&D capabilities call for expansion to world class standards. Our entrepreneurial skills cry out to be unleashed. Therefore a national security plan frame-work for these tasks and political support for them have to be mobilized. As a beginning, the cadres of national parties need to be educated. The biggest hurdle we will face is the parochialism of our party politicians.

The late US strategist George Tanham said that India did not have a strategic culture and he was right. The immediate task facing the Prime minister is to create a cadre of people within the Government who will devote fulltime thought to Indian national security management and generate ideas and concepts on it. We also need people who will carefully study the international situation, politically, economically, technologically, culturally and strategically and assess factors favourable and unfavourable to us to enable the policy makers to adjust the policies to our optimum benefit. We need a number of think tanks to carry out research on future oriented policies.

This entire task is not going to be addressed immediately by the Prime Minister even as he appoints the next NSA. It will take time. But he has to articulate this concept of national security management, and start attracting men and women of ideas and talents towards the National Security Council Secretariat.

\* \* \*

*The Hindi version of the article first appeared in Dainik Jagran on January 24, 2010.*