

## SECURITY AND STRATEGIC CHALLENGES IN 2010

*By C Uday Bhaskar*

2009 was a relatively safe and stable year given the enormity of the terrorist attack on Mumbai in November 2008. In January last year, the mood in India was one of anger and anguish – and while the political rhetoric apropos Pakistan and its support to terrorism and religious extremism was predictable – India's military options were limited. And to the extent that the ultimate objective of the extremist constituencies working against the abiding interests of the people of the sub-continent is to bring India and Pakistan to war – one may take limited satisfaction from the fact that in 2009 there was no recurrence of another Mumbai type incident in India – though the apprehensions were many and the probability of another 26/11 remains reasonably high.

The bi-lateral relationship with China was under some strain in 2009 with Arunachal and border violations on the increase - and in October last, the tension increased to such a point that there was talk about a repeat of 1962. But it is again cause for some satisfaction that the temperatures were lowered on both sides – and wiser counsel prevailed with actual bonhomie between India and China on display in Copenhagen at the climate summit.

However it would be imprudent to make the misleading extrapolation that since 2009 was relatively stable from a security perspective apropos China and Pakistan – that 2010 will be more of the same. On the contrary, given the various turbulences and mini tectonic shifts that have taken place in 2009, I would argue that 2010 will be more contested, complex and challenging for India – with the possibility that the Pakistan factor will become even more animated than what we had witnessed in 2009.

Post the 1962 war with China, the worst case scenario for Indian defense planners has been the need to prosecute a 'two front war' – that is defend against both China and Pakistan. It is instructive that this phrase – the 'two front war' came up again in end December in the Indian security discourse. The Army Chief, General Deepak Kapoor has been quoted widely by the Pakistan media on this matter and various extreme interpretations have been advanced in that country.

But the true two-front war for India in 2010 will be the overlap between the internal security and external dimensions. The traditional distinction between the Defence and Home Ministries as being exclusively responsible for the external and internal will have to be reviewed and here the Chidambaram suggestion that the Home Ministry's charter needs to be re-visited is a welcome first step. The immediate security challenge will be to deal with the terror and violence ala Mumbai that is motivated by religious extremism – and a distortion of the tenets of Islam; and here how to deal with the different power centers in Pakistan – state and non-state will be tricky even as the USA and China craft Pak specific policies that may be detrimental to India. For instance, if as per the Obama Af-Pak policy, the US does actually withdraw from Afghanistan in mid 2011, this could have a significant fall-out for India.

Does India have an objectively arrived at regional security management plan that will include likely developments in Pakistan-Afghanistan in the first instance; and then the smaller neighbors such as Nepal and Sri Lanka – where domestic developments are cause for some concern – particularly as regards the Maoist orientation in Kathmandu? And are the Bangladesh-Myanmar linkages with the Indian north-east now under consensual scrutiny between Delhi-Dhaka and Yangon? Here again the internal and external strands of security telescope in a seamless manner.

But at the more abiding strategic level, India will need to acquire appropriate – and affordable trans-border military capability (fire-power, delivery, surveillance and lift) in a sustained manner that will bolster India's politico-diplomatic profile. Is this China specific? Not necessarily – but an increase in India's comprehensive national power (economic, military and socio-political) will allow for a more stable and predictable bi-lateral relationship with Beijing.

This holistic profile of India will not happen by accident – or as a natural fall-out of existing policies. India's security and strategic policies need a very fundamental review that is long overdue. A tentative beginning was made after the 1999 Kargil War but both the NDA and UPA governments chose not to complete the task they had embarked upon.

The way forward is to acknowledge that India has a serious security deficit – both by way of policy at the political apex and the actual accretion of military –intelligence capacity. Instead the higher levels of the politico-bureaucratic framework entrusted with national security has been more focused on symbolism and procedure. Consequently events like the Republic Day parade become higher priorities and procurement issues are bogged down in controversy and finger-pointing by the major political players.

A nation whose parliament does not spend even one hour before according approval for a Rs 140,000 plus annual defence outlay cannot be seen to be serious about its security. My personal advocacy would be for parliament to take up national security – and policy options in a sustained manner in the next session. The Kargil related Government initiatives of 2000 under the UPA and the more recent Rama Rao committee report regarding the DRDO could form the subjects for discussion – for at least a month – which is the time that will be required to get a sense of the policy reforms required to make India's national security preparedness more viable. And as regards symbols – the Republic Day Parade of January 2010 should be the last such extravaganza and closure is called for now that the Republic is 60 years old. If such steps for redressal are not taken, it is more likely that 2010 will be a very troubled year.

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