

# Can India learn from the US National Security Strategy

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## **Introduction**

President Donald Trump unveiled his National Security Strategy (NSS) last week. He announced his views on it, which is a departure from his predecessors. The Goldwater Nichols act mandates every US President to declare their NSS on a yearly basis. Most presidents issue one or two during their entire tenure (even if it spans two tenures of eight years). Issuing one within his first year in office indicates to his government, which direction he desires them to take. On ground, the policy may be tweaked depending on changing global coalitions, however, responses from across the globe indicate its international acceptability.

## **Relevance of the document**

China and Russia, being termed as the US's main competitors have severely criticized the document and the approach of the US towards them. Pakistan, which came in for severe criticism has also been vocal in its objections. India, on the other hand has welcomed the document. This implies that the document has relevance and is studied across the globe.

Such a document, if carefully drafted, guides departments of the government on their approach to challenges and threats facing the nation. India has yet to have any enunciated national security policy. In our case, it should have been the National Security Council, established in 1999, which should have authored it. It has not been published mainly due to coalition nature of our politics, where views on dealing with challenges facing the nation are at wide variance due to leanings of political parties. However, as we emerge as an international power, we need to reconsider our approach and prepare to issue a policy document.

## **Implications of not possessing a national security policy**

Lack of a policy document implies that there will be no whole of government approach to threats, both external and internal, facing the nation. Even the armed forces would flounder on, unguided by a common approach, based on their own threat perceptions, seeking capabilities which they feel they would require in the future. Therefore, different services would view threats from their specific angles, presuming to combat them individually, thereby demanding essential capabilities. Government departments would also lumber on, battling crises after crises, with minimum inter-governmental coordination.

## **Importance to military power**

A casual reading of the US NSS would indicate the importance their national leadership has given to joint operations and enhancing military power. There is a clear link between foreign policy, emerging threats and a strong and capable military. It has been stated in multiple places that military power needs to be enhanced to counter future threats and that a powerful military also strengthens diplomacy and enables shaping of the international environment.

George Keenan once remarked, 'you have no idea how much it contributes to the general politeness and pleasantness of diplomacy when you have a little quiet force in the background'. Jim Mattis, stated last weekend, while addressing soldiers in Fort Bragg on tensions in the Korean peninsula, 'My fine young soldiers, the only way our diplomats can speak with authority and be believed, is if you're ready to go'.

An analysis of each nature of threat, would lead to deducing the right level of military capabilities essential for national security. In our case, lack of such a document, permits the finance ministry to control defence expenditure and procurement, without any responsibility for national security. It is a lopsided

approach, resulting in the defence minister requiring sanction from the finance ministry on matters concerning national security, even though funds have been released for defence, specifically to the ministry. It therefore adds one more layer of concurrence or rejection for military procurements.

Funds allocated for procurements for national security have also been reducing by the year, despite threats increasing manifold. Regular adverse comments on the same from the parliamentary committee of defence have had no impact. Every year the finance minister states in his budget presentation that there are no shortages of funds for national security, yet the armed forces have been compelled to restrict even their essential procurements. Had there been clear necessities of developing essential capabilities laid down to counter emerging threats, in an official security policy document, such a state would not have risen. It is further compounded by a toothless HQ of Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), which cannot issue a coordinated capability development plan.

Joint operations are an urgent requirement for any nation seeking to be a military power. They can only be implemented by integrating the three services. This involves creating theatre commands and appointing a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). In India, the government, despite the Subramanyam committee report post the Kargil war, has yet to take a decision in this regard. Jointness remains miles away. India has only taken cosmetic steps by establishing a few joint organizations and issuing a joint training directive simply because governments fearing a coup by appointing an all powerful CDS, continues to seek political consensus, which may never happen.

### **Importance of an industrial base**

The US national security strategy also highlights the importance of a strong internal defence base. The statement in the document which needs to be noted is, 'support for a vibrant domestic manufacturing sector, a solid defence industrial base and resilient supply chain'. In India, it is only now, that the private sector is being encouraged to become a part of defence R

and D and manufacturing. This encouragement needs to be continued, with greater orders being placed on them. The government needs to revamp the DRDO and support the private sector more. Only in those fields where DRDO has made a breakthrough should it be encouraged. Providing reservations in defence procurement, by compelling the armed forces to acquire low grade DRDO products is meaningless.

### **Contingency plans for shaping the environment**

The document also includes contingency plans for handling of crises and options for employment of funds to shape the environment to suit national objectives. It also brings about a synergy between the two major organs of the government in handling crises across the globe, foreign and defence ministries. While the Indian armed forces have no role outside our region as Indian policy does not envisage such a role, however, lack of a reliable document, makes the government ignore growing military soft power and military diplomacy.

India has been expending large quantum of funds in our immediate neighbourhood seeking to woo our neighbours away from Chinese influence. A national security policy would lay down the government's goals and options to achieve this objective, by adopting a whole of government approach.

Recent years have witnessed an increasing number of countries seeking military to military cooperation with India. This is an indicator of international recognition of the professionalism of the Indian armed forces and enhancement of military soft power. This should be suitably dovetailed with the foreign ministry for shaping the near environment to our advantage. However, lack of a concrete policy keeps the armed forces away from the decision-making process. Rivalry between the civil and military service ensures it is ignored.

The US has termed China as its main competitor and supports alliances to contain its expansion and belligerence. India has been facing the brunt of Chinese hegemonistic attitude and thus needs a comprehensive strategy

involving all branches of the government to contain it. Further, it would guide the direction India would need to adopt to counter China including developing infrastructure along the Chinese frontier.

### **Conclusion**

The future belongs to Asia and the Indian Ocean and India will be a major international player. As a growing power India requires to create a viable document to synergize all branches of the government, enhance military capabilities and build an international consensus amongst allies, to deter emerging threats in the region. It may not be a yearly nor biennial, possibly even one for five years would be sufficient. Ignoring it implies floundering along as we have been doing till date.

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