

The 18th Colonel Pyara Lal Memorial Lecture, 2014

**Revamping India's National Security Architecture for Optimum Synergy in
the Use of its Instruments of National Power***

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General Satish Nambiar, General PK Singh, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I am deeply honoured for having been invited to deliver the 18th Colonel Pyara Lal Memorial Lecture at the United Service Institution of India (USI). I would like to thank the USI and its Director, General PK Singh for giving me this opportunity to interact with a very distinguished gathering and I specially thank General Nambiar, a much admired soldier and thinker, for having consented to chair this morning's session.

This memorial lecture honours the memory and contributions of a distinguished soldier, Colonel Pyara Lal, whose name is closely associated with the USI. He served for several years as the Director of the Institute and helped to build it into a centre of excellence. The USI Journal of which he was the editor, was transformed into a major forum for intellectual debate and reasoned discourse on the entire spectrum of national security and defence related issues. It is most befitting that we honour his memory today by focusing on a key challenge for our Country, that of ensuring national security in a vastly transformed and still rapidly transforming domestic and international environment. We need to make a correct assessment of the nature of the contemporary security challenges our Country confronts, analyse how these are likely to change and what is the most appropriate institutional architecture to deliver the results required.

National Security of a modern state not only endeavours to safeguard its territorial integrity and national sovereignty but is also indispensable for the pursuit of economic and social development of its citizens by ensuring and sustaining a supportive internal and external environment. National Security in the contemporary context goes beyond its narrower conceptions of internal security and defence. It has multiple and inter-related dimensions which demand cross-cutting and integrated responses for which traditionally hierarchical governance

* Text of the talk delivered by Shri Shyam Saran, IFS (Retd) at USI on 22 Sep 2014 with Lieutenant General Satish Nambiar, PVSM, AVSM, VrC (Retd), a Padma Shri awardee, former Director USI, in the Chair.

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structures, working in relatively autonomous silos are no longer effective. In order to ensure policy coherence every country needs to articulate a National Security Strategy which enjoys broad political consensus and provides a stable and predictable template against which various component parts of the State take decisions on a whole range of issues they must deal with on a day to day basis. Without such an overall strategy National Security decisions often take on an ad hoc, fragmented, reactive and sometimes contradictory character and the State appears to lurch from one crisis to another. As stated earlier, in the contemporary context, National Security involves multiple dimensions, which are closely inter-linked through strong feedback loops. Let us explore this aspect further.

Rapid technological change, in particular the digital revolution, has accelerated the process of globalisation and the traditional concept of a relatively autonomous nation state no longer conforms to reality. The world has become an interconnected and interdependent space blurring the distinction between what is domestic and what may be considered external. In tackling domestic challenges such as food, water and energy security or trans-border crime and cross-border terrorism India finds itself impacted by developments taking place outside its borders. India's economy is vulnerable to global financial and commodity shocks as a result of greater integration into the global financial system and its increasing import dependence for key resources. Its responses to these challenges will require a coordinated mix of domestic and foreign policy actions. The pursuit of foreign policy goals will be influenced by the country's economic and military capabilities, but foreign policy can also contribute significantly to the acquisition of these capabilities.

It is also evident that the sheer size of India's population and economy, and the scale of its strengths and weaknesses, have a significant impact on a range of global and cross-cutting issues; for example, in confronting the threat of global Climate Change, tackling global public health issues such as AIDs and other pandemics and dealing with the issues of food and energy security. The choices India makes in any of these domains will alter their global outlook and this gives India significant leverage. Any National Security Strategy will have to take this complex reality into account. This also implies the creation of institutional structures that permit coordinated responses across domestic and external domains as well as multi-disciplinary capacities among those who run the institutions.

In addition to the blurring of lines between what is domestic and what is external, we are also confronted with the reality of the complex interaction among

different resource domains such as water, energy and food. Water is essential to the production of food. It is also integral to many forms of energy production. Energy, on the other hand is required for modern agricultural production. In many instances access to water is dependent upon the availability of power. India is confronted with a serious depletion of fresh water resources and diminished access to affordable energy, which in turn impacts on food security. Food security is already facing a crisis due to shortage of arable land and the decreasing fertility of soil. This may lock India into a cycle of reduced water, energy and food security which in turn would exacerbate the incidence of poverty, hunger and disease. Furthermore, the impact of global Climate Change is already making the situation more fraught. It is apparent that the issues of water, energy and food security cannot be tackled as separate challenges. Being closely inter-linked with strong feedback loops they demand cross-domain responses. Policy coherence across sectors is an urgent necessity. This will not be possible unless we break away from current governance structures that operate in compartments without taking cognizance of these feedback loops. Vulnerabilities in one domain may exacerbate those in related domains. Increased capabilities in one domain may reinforce strengths in other domains. In addition to new horizontal, cross-domain institutional mechanisms one must also ensure human resources that are increasingly multi-disciplinary. The country's education system will need to cater to these new requirements.

Another aspect which has acquired critical importance is strategic communications. In a democracy, citizens are at the heart of any concept of National Security. The objective of National Security is to ensure the well-being and security of citizens but citizens ought to be as active participants in this respect as governments must be. Strategic communications seeks to align public perceptions with the state's policy objectives through continuous engagement with the citizenry. The channels of communication must be two way and ensure feedback. This will enable constant policy review and adjustment. An institutional structure is required to disseminate and to receive information in a timely manner and such information must carry credibility. The use of social media must become an important part of this endeavour.

If we look at our current governance structures, we find that even within specific domains, there is significant fragmentation. Take energy, for example, where no coherent strategy is possible since there are different ministries and agencies that pursue policies each from its own narrow perspective. Energy sources, such as coal, oil and gas are mostly fungible and substitutable; therefore

inter-se pricing must be based on a comprehensive and overall assessment. Pricing must also be based on what our long term energy strategy is, in particular which fuel source needs to be promoted and which one to be discouraged. Our import dependency on oil is now over 75 per cent and likely to reach 90 per cent in the next two decades. This undermines the Country's energy security and yet there is no credible policy to deal with this challenge. The Ministries of Coal, Power and New and Renewable Sources of Energy have been put under a single minister, and perhaps this is a start. However, the ministries continue to be separate entities and it is difficult to see how they can come up with integrated policy responses. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas will continue to function in its own bubble while Hydro-power will remain the responsibility of the Ministry of Water Resources. There is a crying need for an empowered institutional structure, like an Energy Commission which can make comprehensive assessments of India's energy challenge, draw up appropriate strategies and have the authority to implement them.

Let me turn to the military dimension of security in some greater detail since this would be of greater interest to this audience. Traditionally, wars have been fought over the land, sea and air and these platforms are increasingly integrated with one another in modern warfare. Post the Second World War we have added the nuclear domain. However, we now have a much more complex reality with the appearance of the Space and Cyber domains, which are both platforms in themselves but also pervade all other domains. No modern war fighting is possible without heavy reliance on cyber capabilities; neither is it possible without the navigation and surveillance capabilities provided by space based assets. The threat spectrum has also undergone a change. It now extends from the sub-conventional all the way to nuclear exchange and a country needs capabilities and strategies which enable it to meet threats at any level of the escalation ladder. This also implies the ability to integrate capabilities in each domain. It must also be appreciated that in modern warfare it may be difficult to separate military targets from civilian targets. Cyber attack on critical civilian infrastructure may have consequences far more significant than damage to military installations. In any case military activities are heavily reliant on civilian infrastructure such as the transport network.

Currently, India does not have an integrated command structure even for the three armed services, let alone the integration of the nuclear, cyber and space domains. Each armed service has its own cyber cell and space cell with little inter-service engagement and synergy. A Group of Ministers Report as far back as 2001

had recommended a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) who would provide a single point military advice to the Minister of Defence, ensure jointness in the Armed Forces, ensure long term planning and inter-service prioritisation and administer the Strategic (Nuclear) Forces. It would now be necessary for the new domains of Cyber and Space, as they pertain to defence, to also be placed under the CDS management. The CDS could also bring a degree of coherence into the area of defence research and development, aligning it more closely with the perspective plans for the Services.

There are strong arguments in favour of setting up an empowered CDS with authority to override Service Chiefs. He would have a key role in the Nuclear Command Authority. Currently the Strategic Forces Commander functions under the Chairman, Chief of Staff Committee, who is the senior most Service Chief serving in rotation. He cannot devote the attention to Strategic Forces that is indispensable even while being in operational command of his own particular service. There is also little continuity since the Chairman sometimes serves only a few months before retirement. There is also a strong preference for the setting up of separate Space and Cyber Commands for the Armed Forces, which would also be placed under the CDS. The National Security Council headed by the Prime Minister would continue to be the apex decision making authority and the National Security Adviser, who is the Secretary of the Council would in turn work closely with the CDS.

Taking into account the fact that the military and civilian domains are closely interlinked, there should be constant engagement and interaction between the two. For example, the proposed Cyber Command should work in close coordination with the National Information Board which brings together the cyber capabilities that exist in the civilian domain.

Maritime Security is a key aspect of National Security. It is in the ocean expanse which surrounds the Indian peninsula where there are opportunities for power projection using naval assets. While India has a significant naval force capability, it is not a maritime power. Maritime power is related to the scale of a country's international trade, its possession of a merchant fleet to carry its sea borne trade, extensive ship building capabilities , modern ports with efficient port handling facilities and, of course, a strong navy to protect its sea lanes, its ships and sea-based assets. Only 11 per cent of India's external trade is carried in Indian ships. Indian ship building has actually declined in recent years. There continues to be a serious lack of modern ports, which compels trans-shipment of a very large

proportion of India related cargoes through Colombo, Singapore and Dubai. Therefore, in addition to expanding our naval forces, it is necessary to recognise that Maritime Security in any real sense would require urgent measures to remedy the current inadequacies on the maritime front. A Maritime Commission would enable the formulation of a National Maritime Strategy including naval forces, shipbuilding in military and commercial sectors, port development and port handling facilities for both civilian and military use and the development of a significant merchant fleet. This will synergise efforts in both civilian and military sectors.

As would be apparent, National Security can no longer be compartmentalised into purely civilian and military domains. They need to work through collaborative engagement. It should be self evident that a country's foreign and security policy needs to be closely aligned with its military capabilities. An external posture not anchored in corresponding military capabilities will undermine credibility and expose the country to serious threats. This is the reason why I strongly believe that our foreign policy establishment needs to work in close consultation with our Armed Forces and look upon the latter as an important instrument of diplomacy.

The Indian Constitution prescribes civilian authority over the military and this principle remains unchallenged. However, current security challenges can only be addressed effectively through combined efforts among the Services and between civil and military establishments. This will only be possible if the current strains in civil-military relations are addressed with sensitivity. The deputation of civil servants in Forces headquarters and in the CDS secretariat to work together with their uniformed counterparts as well as the deputation of military officers in the Ministry of Defence and other security related ministries and agencies should be encouraged. This would enhance mutual familiarity with the nature of work and requirements confronted by civilian and military establishments and promote better understanding and inter-personal relations.

I have been able to touch upon only a few key elements of a National Security Strategy for India and the characteristics of the governance structure needed to deliver on that strategy. The subject is vast and complex and it has not been possible to explore all its different aspects in detail. However, I trust that my brief talk today has given you a general sense of the nature of National Security challenges our Country confronts and the institutional transformation required to

deal with them successfully. I would like to summarise the main conclusions as under :-

- (a) National Security of a modern state goes beyond domestic and external domains. It has to be approached in a comprehensive frame involving multiple domains, which are interlinked and impact upon each other.
- (b) There is need for a National Security Strategy which can provide a template on which a whole of government approach becomes possible. In a democracy like India, such a strategy must enjoy broad political consensus. There is need for a strategic communications strategy to enable such consensus.
- (c) Governance structures must be transformed to enable cross-domain interventions and this requires human resources with multi-disciplinary skills.

I thank you for your attention.