



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

# THE NEED FOR INDIA TO GO SLOW ON NATIONAL SPACE POLICY

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Policy making is known to be an inherently time consuming and complex endeavour. The complexities multiply in case of an inherently complex subject such as space and become especially more complex when both the subject (space) and the object (populace) are to be bound together by a comprehensive policy aimed at serving a nation of over two Billion<sup>1</sup> people. Of these two Billion, around 300 Million are below the poverty line, an equal number are on the line and many more keep straying above and below the line. Space is omnipresent and impacts poverty, well-being, day-to-day life, civil and military development in equal measure and is hence a precious finite commodity eagerly coveted by one and all. At the same time, space capabilities are not transient; evolving capabilities take time, the gestation periods related to programmes are high, technologies take time to mature and the return on investments are slow. A comprehensive listing of the factors that go into evolving a national space policy is neither possible nor desirable. For a country with the sheer size, numbers and complexities as India, It would be too ambitious to aim at a comprehensive space policy that serves most of its citizens as in case of Germany or where the policy has no great impact as in case of Australia that is sparsely populated. The overall aim in our case can possibly be to only arrive at the utilitarian goal of the “*greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible numbers*”.<sup>2</sup>

To arrive at the above dictum, it would still be essential to firstly identify the key stake holders, the partners, the areas of priority, the resources (existing and potential), and a host of other factors that translates into cross-linking with a variety of governmental agencies that are directly and indirectly linked to acquisition, development and optimal exploitation of space capabilities. The national canvas of development and security is vast and hence this would inherently involve enormous interaction and inter-mingling amongst governmental agencies, international agencies and also the private sector since future trends clearly indicate a greater role for commerce and industry. The overall process is aimed at

- (a) Arriving at a coherent, fairly comprehensive policy that provides policy directions for conduct of the nation's civil, commercial and military space programme,
- (b) A policy that covers its relations with international partners clarifies the roles, responsibilities and inter-relationships of the various Ministries and Government departments
- (c) A policy that clarifies the Government's stand on conduct of national space activities.

All of these and a host of other activities demand enormous liaison, coordination and are consequently time consuming and complex. The point being made is that a knee-jerk endeavour that fails to factor in the various dynamics amongst the numerous entities is not likely to serve our interests in any manner. It would only do the opposite; obfuscate rather than clarify issues and hence it is pertinent that an attempt to reach out to all possible stake-holders is made while the time and opportunity exists. The process would certainly be time consuming and yet once completed would be as all-encompassing and comprehensive as possible. While the process trundles on, the existing mechanism like the prevailing national legislation, the civilian charter on space, the satellite communication policy and a variety of other guidelines would continue to guide actions.

Additionally, in order to gauge how emergent it is to release a national space policy, it would also be good to look at how many nations have a space policy across the world. The table below briefly sums up the situation.

<b>SPACE FARING NATIONS WITH FULL COMPLEMENT OF LAUNCH, MANUFACTURE &amp; GROUND SYSTEMS</b>		
<b>NATION</b>	<b>SPACE POLICY</b>	<b>REMARKS</b>
US	Yes	2006 policy replaced by 2010 policy <sup>3</sup> .
Russia	No	Policy document Federal Space Programme 2006-15 became 201-2025 delayed & likely "in near future" <sup>4</sup> .
China	No	No policy documents, only white papers on space.
France	No	
India	No	
Japan	Yes	Basic plan for Space Policy released in 2009
<b>NATIONS WITH PART COMPLEMENT OF LAUNCH, MANUFACTURE &amp; GROUND SYSTEMS</b>		
Canada	Yes	Canada's Space Policy Framework <sup>5</sup>
Israel	No	
Britain	No	
Germany	Yes	Federal Space Strategy of 2010 <sup>6</sup>
Italy	No	
Australia	Yes	Principles for National Space Industry Policy <sup>7</sup>
Brazil	No	
South Korea	No	
South Africa	No	

From the above, it is clear that of the 195 nation-states recognised by the United Nations and who use space in a variety of ways, only five nations deem it essential to have a national space policy. The figure is even lesser amongst space faring nations. Apart from the US, that evolved its policies over a period of time and has been refining its national space policy in line with its overall agenda, most other nations are yet to put their blocks in place. Going by the Russian experience, the process is both time consuming and fraught with delays. Consequently, it would be essential that India pursues a balanced strategy of refining existing mechanisms while working deliberately, purposefully and cautiously on the building blocks. It would serve our purpose to go slow on words and fast on action. Right now, a space policy is less important than what we do with space assets. Our progress in space should grow with

knowledge and experience rather than be tied to a hastily put together space policy whose life is as uncertain as its impact.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])*

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Ref Report of Planning Commission, Government of India, "Report of Expert Group to Review the Methodology for Measurement of Poverty", June 2014 @ [http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/genrep/pov\\_rep0707.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/genrep/pov_rep0707.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The quote is attributed to Sir Jeremy Bentham (1776), see JH Burns, "Happiness and Utility", Jeremy Bentham's equation at <http://www.utilitarianism.com/jeremy-bentham/greatest-happiness.pdf>

