

# NATIONAL SECURITY SCAN: ARE THE GOOD DAYS COMING?

**P.V. NAIK**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The euphoria of the epic general elections is over. As per statisticians, at least 33 percent of voters are absolutely thrilled at their sagacity. The mood in the country is upbeat despite El Nino and the economic slowdown. Although the average citizen knows in his/her heart that things cannot change in a hurry, the mounting inflation and the dismounting subsidies are already causing heartburn. In the meanwhile, by all reports, the government seems to have got down to putting in place a more responsive and hygienic system of 'governance'.

Today, the South Asian region ranks as one of the three flashpoints in the world along with the Middle East and North Korea. Within this region, lies a group of nations in troubled transition to modernity, their external discourse damned by internal contradictions. In a world moving towards integration, many of these nations remain torn by ethnic and religious strife, economic disparities and political instability. For obvious reasons, it is full of turmoil. The internal dynamics and external influences have led to increase in the degree of uncertainty.

As a member of this region, India remains vulnerable to the disturbances spilling over from its neighbours. India itself is at a crossroads. We witness

---

Air Chief Marshal **P.V. Naik** PVSM, VSM (Retd) is a former Chief of the Air Staff, Indian Air Force.

**As a member of this region, India remains vulnerable to the disturbances spilling over from its neighbours. India itself is at a crossroads. We witness this giant stirring into wakefulness – into an awareness of its power today. This rise in stature brings with it greater responsibilities and a larger role in regional as well as global affairs.**

this giant stirring into wakefulness – into an awareness of its power today. This rise in stature brings with it greater responsibilities and a larger role in regional as well as global affairs. This demands not only a change in policy, internal and external, but a fundamental change in our very thinking, ethos and value system. This, then, is the challenge before the government. It is in an unenviable position of having to balance the vast burden of public aspirations with some hard-headed, tough governance, on the one hand; boost the sagging economy on the other hand; and, at the same time, convince the world that we are not to be

trifled with. What, then, should the priorities of the government be?

### **PRIORITIES: AN OVERVIEW**

The government has been blessed with a massive mandate by the people of India. Public participation and media hype have, perhaps, been unprecedented in recent history. But therein lies the rub. Now everyone from the *chaiwala* to a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) feels he/she is a major stakeholder and is demanding that the government start delivering the goods. Let us have a brief glance at the people's priorities.

**Top Ten:** Some of these are checking corruption, taming inflation, reviving the economy, boosting manufacture, agriculture, etc

**Powerful:** These include denationalisation of the coal sector, corporatisation of the railways, establishing a land bank, etc

**Defence:** Includes increase in the budget, streamlining acquisition procedures, boost in indigenous capability, etc.

**External:** These range from Indo-US relations to dealing with China and Pakistan to relations with neighbouring states, the Look East policy, etc.

This list is purely illustrative. The 'etc' at the end includes a myriad

others, equally vital. So the question is: how does a government deal with such a massive agenda? One way is to qualify them into essential, desirable and routine. Many of them will have to be tempered with political considerations. Some of them will be kept in abeyance. Some will be dictated by the emerging international scenario. Whatever be the disposal, one common thread runs through the entire process. They all have to be measured against a common time base. Time is of the essence chiefly because India is at the cusp of its political and economic power.

I am fairly sanguine that the Prime Minister (PM) and his Cabinet are more than seized of all the nuances. I shall attempt to put forward some of my views specifically related to the defence and security scenarios.

### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

One aspect that has been conspicuous by its absence in official articulations is national strategy. Simply put, where we are and where we wish to be in the 20-40 years timeframe has not been given adequate thought in government quarters. I am sure someone must have articulated some thoughts, someone must have worked towards a formulation, at least some of our leaders must be familiar with it. How come, then, that almost all our endeavours, be it in foreign relations, arms acquisitions bills/ ordinances, internal security, or key appointments smack of ad-hocism? The lack of strategic direction ultimately contributes to a lack of national character and a lack of national will, two maladies we have been afflicted with for decades.

National strategy comprises many disciplines, which include defence, security, economy, agriculture, industry, diplomacy, foreign relations. Once national strategy is defined, debated, modified and enunciated, it defines the broad path to follow, regardless of who is in power. All

**One aspect that has been conspicuous by its absence in official articulations is national strategy. Simply put, where we are and where we wish to be in the 20-40 years timeframe has not been given adequate thought in government quarters.**

other strategies like military, economic, industrial, etc flow from it. The process of formulation must start now. A group of experts from as many fields as practical should be tasked to present the first draft in a time-bound period. Let it first be debated within the government and then publicly. The media must be taken on board at a predetermined time. Thereafter, we need to publish a White Paper for the benefit of the world so that others are also privy to our thinking. March 2015 could be the target date.

### **EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION**

We have laws, rules, regulations for every conceivable contingency. Our problem is implementation. Effective implementation involves every citizen, but more so, it is dealt with by the bureaucracy and the police.

**The Police:** Generations have either been entertained by the antics of policemen and women on celluloid, been contemptuous of them or fearful of them. This is partly a carryover from the colonial days when they were actively used to further the nefarious activities of the British rulers. In the 67 years after independence, their lot has not improved. What can one expect of a police force that is understaffed, underpaid, underhoused, misused and abused by the political masters? The common excuse given is that it is a state subject and the Centre can only make suggestions. If we want effective implementation, we have to immediately and earnestly improve their lot. Some suggestions are:

Amend the archaic Police Act. A long pending issue.

Improve pay scales, living and working conditions, and provide access to better technology and weapons. Insist on states' compliance.

Recruit to fill deficiencies.

Control of the police must be with police officers and not with politicians. This is a sensitive issue and this is where the wheels of progress get stuck. Unless we overcome this resistance, we condemn the police to continuing in the same state.

**The Bureaucracy:** The Nehruvian era saw the rise of the bureaucracy. In my opinion, they have to bear a share of responsibility for the poor

governance that ails our country today. Their rise was aided and abetted by indifferent ministers who preferred to let the bureaucrats run the ministries. The problem has always been a lack of accountability. The ministers were so overly dependent on them that they could not make demands on them or take them to task. Fortunately, the new government has made this its first priority and the results are already showing in both North and South Blocks, if the media are to be believed.

### INTERNAL SECURITY

The dimensions of this challenge are staggering. At one end is the individual security of citizens, especially women. The other end of the spectrum comprises Naxals, the Northeast (NE) states, Article 370 and outfits like the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami (HUJI) and Indian Mujahideen (IM). As far as individual security is concerned, policing is the only immediate answer. Reforms on this have already been discussed earlier. Let us address the others.

**Naxals:** The origin of the Naxal problem is attributable to socio-political and socio-economic repression. The poor and the Scheduled Castes were downtrodden by the Zamindars. Land reforms were negligible. Forest land was shrinking. Added to that, there was no development. In fact, governance was sorely lacking. At first, the states sought to control the problem through the state police forces. Most of the police forces were in a poor state. Numbers, infrastructure, weapons were minimal. They were swiftly rendered ineffective and the Para-Military Forces (PMFs) were called in. Meanwhile, the movement became more coordinated and stretched across state boundaries. As the Naxal movement snowballed, the PMFs were stymied. Some of the reasons for their underperformance are given below

The states jealously guarded their jurisdictions and frowned on any infringement by sister states. Since the problem stretched across state boundaries, continuity was a problem. The situation was like a balloon. If you applied pressure on one side, the other side would swell and the Naxals migrated to other states. There was no coordinated plan to counter the menace.

Different forces even with similar weapons and manpower tend to operate differently in anti-terrorist/insurgent situations. The difference comes in because of the leadership, command and control, the ethos of the organisation and the operational awareness. Presently, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is employed in company or platoon strength, often attached to the local police, with no specified area of operations. Inspectors are often in their 50s with insufficient knowledge of terrain or local conditions. Stamina and motivation are often not as high as would obtain in a younger, professional leadership cadre. The local police is used for intelligence. There is no coordinated intelligence grid and despite some efforts, no inter-state intelligence sharing. Even when invaluable intelligence is obtained, the reaction is slow due to a convoluted command chain.

A lot of money has been spent on acquiring new weapons and equipment. Training has not been commensurate. To illustrate this through an example, when the Indian Air Force's (IAF's) Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) were deployed over Dantewada, we had accurate and timely intelligence on a large gathering of Naxals. The IAF had even trained the CRPF in slithering down from choppers since the roads were likely to be mined. The choppers were ready but the troops took a long time to assemble. Such fleeting targets do not remain in one place for a long time and the operation was a failure. The security of camps needs beefing up. Training standards must be raised, new weapons and equipment practised with. A communication grid needs to be established and soldiers trained in its use.

This paper is not meant to deal with how to tackle the Naxal menace. But the inevitable aftermath of massacres like Chintalnagar is media hysteria. There is public outrage, and in trying to minimise the political damage, the political leadership comes out with all kinds of pacific statements. Then, an inevitable response is to induct the armed forces to kill the Naxals and wipe them out. This needs to be placed in perspective. The armed forces are India's armed forces. They are the people's forces and prepared to make the supreme sacrifice to protect the people and the country from external and internal threats. The armed forces are also aware of the need for civil control over the military. If they are called to step in to restore order due to

bad governance, then they are equal stakeholders in good governance also, being equal partners in the well-being and development of the country. They must make their views known to the people. Of course, the ethos of the armed forces is that once the government passes an order, it is their bounden duty to execute that order with all the commitment at their disposal.

A solution to the Naxal problem needs to include the socio-political and developmental aspects also and a pure military intervention will not be sufficient. It is going to take a long time to come to grips with this issue and, in my opinion, a short-term, quick fix solution, however attractive, must not be resorted to. Presently, the armed forces' participation is restricted to the army and the IAF. Let us have a look at some of the problems involved.

The army and the air force are meant to annihilate the enemy. The enemy is very clear and unambiguous. It operates on the principle of the maximum force in the minimum time. The concept of minimum force is very rarely applied. Whereas in a civil scenario, minimum force is paramount. The army has been operating alongside the PMFs in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) for decades and has brought the terrorist activities under good control. But at what cost? Their conventional training has suffered. Their peace-to-field ratio has suffered, raising morale issues. Their weapons are for war, ill suited against terrorists. The moment they come in contact with the local constabulary, their character rubs off on the soldiers and causes disciplinary issues.

Insurgents are fleeting targets. Especially in the Naxal context, there is common ethnicity. Air weapons are fired from long ranges which precludes identification of minute targets. Therefore, 120 percent surety of target intelligence is mandatory to prevent fratricide. We do not yet possess this technology. Our intelligence has never achieved such accuracy. Uninformed people talk of dropping weapons through a window. Of course, the IAF has the capability to fire a weapon through a 2' x 2' window. But the payload is, let us say, 200 kg. When it explodes, it has a lethal radius of a 100 m. So whither collateral damage? We do not have 'lo- charge' or 'lo- lethal' weapons as yet for air-to-surface firing. However, such weapons are now emerging on the world stage.

**Helicopters are a potent force in anti-Naxal/anti-terrorist operations. They can be, and are even now are being, used in a variety of vital roles. Some tasks are reconnaissance, surveillance, logistics, insertion/extraction of troops, casualty evacuation, air-drop/resupply.**

RPA or drones, at first glance, seem to provide the answer. They, however, have a lot of limitations. Firstly, they need to be parked carefully, protected from weather and strong winds. In flight, weather and clouding are major hazards. They are ineffective over jungle terrain except with certain payloads. They can detect and track, but cannot attack unless they are of the Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs) variety. Transit speeds are about 100 to 150 k/h and they are noisy. Modern RPA with Vertical/Short Take-Off and Landing (V/STOL) capabilities are in the offing and these would better deal with such operations.

Helicopters are a potent force in anti-Naxal/anti-terrorist operations. They can be, and are even now are being, used in a variety of vital roles. Some tasks are reconnaissance, surveillance, logistics, insertion/extraction of troops, casualty evacuation, air-drop/resupply. Helicopters are most vulnerable during the take-off and landing phases. In spite of armour, the air force has lost a gunner to Naxal ground fire because the helipad zone was not properly sanitised. The air force helicopters are in short supply. They provide logistics support to the army all the year round. Any pull-out is likely to increase the load on the others. So is the case with the numbers of crew.

It seems almost inevitable that in the not too distant future, the role of the armed forces in such insurgencies will increase. The first to be affected will be the army, covertly or overtly. However, all is not lost. This, too, can be managed. It will involve operations under a central planning agency involving all the stakeholders. The chain of command must be clear. Development and socio-political balm must be applied, synchronous with military operations. Synergy is the order of the day. Leadership, training, infrastructure, equipping are prerequisites to such endeavours. Some organisations may need restructuring and rejuvenating. In my opinion, it is likely to be an 'out'



to 'in' approach: forces operating out of a few well protected bases, conducting operations and returning to a safe home, first to stabilise the easier areas, secure them, and then act on the more difficult areas.

The central areas of the country may prove difficult to cordon off. In border areas like J&K, there is scope for a more offensive use of air power. RPA, in conjunction with special mission aircraft like the C-130 J and helicopters with Night Vision Devices (NVDs) give excellent results if the target area is well defined. In J&K, Red Zones can be implemented on the ground and used to stymie intrusions. Technology will need to be harnessed, especially in communications and imagery, to deliver the best results.

**NE States, HUJI, IM, etc:** The NE states must be brought into the mainstream. They have contributed significantly to national wealth and have been ignored. Build-up of road/rail infrastructure should be a priority. I have clubbed organisations like HUJI to point out a salient difference. Naxals, Nagas are indigenous, rural. Their ire is against indigenous indifference, maltreatment or misgovernance. The *jihadi* organisations, on the other hand, project the agenda of external powers, with separation from the Union as their prime objective. So while one needs to be resolved by winning the hearts and minds, the other needs ruthless eradication.

**J&K:** A problem we have faced and fought over for decades, this is not likely to be resolved in the near future. However, it is equally vital for us not to forget that Kashmir is an integral part of our Union. I am of the opinion that Article 370 needs to be done away with. Obviously, it is too early to resolve this problem, but Article 370 must continue to be discussed openly at regular intervals so that the people become aware of all its nuances.

**India's strategic perspectives are shaped by its history, geography, geo-political realities and the demands of realpolitik. Our native culture, our innate traditions of trust and tolerance, and our vision of world peace shape our national character, which, in turn, impacts our international relations.**

## EXTERNAL SECURITY

India's strategic perspectives are shaped by its history, geography, geo-political realities and the demands of realpolitik. Our native culture, our innate traditions of trust and tolerance, and our vision of world peace shape our national character, which, in turn, impacts our international relations. These vital parameters are as relevant today as they have been earlier. India shares borders with 11 neighbours. Our relations with some are uneasy and with some, hostile. Any unrest within this somewhat hostile neighbourhood spills over into our borders in many forms; and with depressing regularity. Unless these geo-political cross-currents affecting us are quietened, they would continue to thwart our desire to move forward. Hence, the first priority becomes improving relations with our immediate neighbours. With a massive public mandate, the government needs to move decisively forward. The PM has already given indications of this by his visits to Bhutan and Nepal.

Among the neighbours, Pakistan remains an immediate concern. We do need to continue dialogue on our own terms but not by bending over backwards. Initiating military-to-military dialogue will be an out-of-the-box step, likely to pay dividends. It could be started at an innocuous level like medical, meteorological and sports exchanges, invitations to seminars, and, depending on how the situation develops, more dimensions can be added. It is important that our politicians repose complete faith in our military. As a policy, we must insist on Pakistan stopping support to terrorism before dialogue can progress.

China is our major concern. We must engage China but from a position of strength. We have a window of 10 to 15 years in which to strengthen the NE in terms of infrastructure. Our missile reach must increase so that deterrence is achieved. Naval presence in the Indian Ocean must be more tangible. But these are long-term objectives. In the short-term, we must engage China in infrastructure and trade, and be patient. The Chinese think in terms of a thousand years and have long memories. Also, they set a lot of store by 'face'. Loss of face cannot be countenanced. This reduces the chances of major misadventures.

India's Look East policy was reenergised during the Manmohan regime. It seems likely that the new PM will also pursue this actively. Japan, Vietnam, Myanmar have a lot to offer us. In fact, presently our national interests also show a congruence in the face of the Chinese stance in the South China Sea. Australia, however, needs to be taken with a pinch of salt in view of its other alliances. I feel relations with the USA, Russia, EU, UK, Israel, the Arab world are on track and part of the long-term perspective.

National interest must reign supreme and regardless of the provocation, it must always dictate Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) actions. Though the frequency has now reduced, we have in the past taken the high moral ground, sometimes even at the cost of our national interests. I agree that the internal situation does colour our external relations, but at one stage, the MEA had achieved the impossible. We had poor relations with all our neighbours. This is something we have to correct immediately.

## DEFENCE

The defence secretary is responsible for the defence of India. The army, navy and air force are attached offices to the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Here lies the defence conundrum. Perpetuated by the innate civil-military trust deficit since the Nehruvian era, no government has addressed this malaise over the last six decades. Events in neighbouring countries have strengthened the trust deficit. The result is that the armed forces of India have no say in the decision-making process; the security apparatus functions with minimal Services' inputs; civilian control over the military has been misinterpreted to ridiculous levels and bureaucrats rule the roost. The topic deserves an entire chapter. But, a few brief suggestions to the government are in order so that it may ameliorate some of the ill effects.

**Integration:** The MoD and the Services must be integrated and brought on par with the other ministries. Lip-service has been paid to this aspect many times. We may start at lower levels like director/colonel equivalent and gradually build up after stabilisation. It is necessary that the order terming Services Headquarters (HQ) as attached offices must be rescinded to make them a part of the decision-making process.

**Budget and Procurement:** The defence budget needs to be upped to at least 3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This has been pending for many years. The argument given is that even now there is unspent money at the end of the financial year. This is basically due to a few reasons. Firstly, it is sometimes done deliberately by Finance so that reallocation to other sectors can be done. Secondly, it is due to indifference at the bureaucratic level because they have no accountability. Lastly, it happens due to inherent delays in the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP). This came into vogue in 2006 and has been refined to its optimum. We need to take a new look at it to simplify it and make it more effective.

**Middlemen:** All corruption in defence deals is attributed to this species. Time and again, the media throws up names and the damage to the exchequer. We must understand that there is no country in the world where foreign companies operate without middlemen. They may be termed agents or facilitators or liaison people. In India, the rules of business are so complex that our own companies would find it difficult to prosecute business without liaison, not to talk of foreign firms. The government had tried to register the names of middlemen a decade ago. The terms and conditions were so onerous and intrusive that, naturally, none came forward. We need to permit middlemen, register them and ensure they pay their taxes for what they receive. This will achieve transparency and, in fact, reduce corruption. A common belief is that this is one of the ways to enhance political party funding, and hence, the reluctance to permit middlemen.

Indigenisation is a crying need since we are one of the biggest importers of arms in the world. Indigenisation cannot happen overnight. We have to create conditions for it to happen. Over the next ten years, we are likely to spend \$230 billion on defence. At 30 percent offsets, the figure comes to a staggering amount. Can our industry handle such offsets? Does our private sector have the strength and capacity to absorb such amounts? We need to simplify our rules to enable the private sector to participate. Perhaps increasing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in defence from the present 27 percent to 60 or 75 percent may be the answer, but it needs detailed examination. There are two things we need to set in motion

at the earliest. First is a reorganisation of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Ordnance Factories (OFs) to make them accountable and efficient. The second is a restructuring of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), our biggest Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) to make it more capable. The results will be visible in three to four years and gradually we would move towards greater indigenisation.

**Pending Issues:** I have clubbed together some issues that should be addressed early. One Rank One Pension (OROP) is an issue affecting the morale of thousands of veterans and needs resolution. Secondly, the 7th Pay Commission, like its predecessors, has no representative of the Services. This should be remedied. Thirdly, a vast country like ours whose soldiers have fought so many wars, does not have a National War Memorial. This is a national shame and needs to be put right.

**CDS:** Any discussion on defence reforms is incomplete without reference to a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). Many acknowledged experts feel that this is the panacea that will set right everything. They are even ready to accept a purely cosmetic appointment of a permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). My views are certainly different.

Different countries have different formulations of CDS. In some, the CDS looks after operations and the three chiefs, the forces. Others have the CDS in charge of training, provisioning, logistics, and intelligence. In some countries, he looks after budgeting and procurement. We need to decide what type of CDS is most suitable for us. Joint operations doctrine naturally flows down to Theatre Commands. This is effective when you envisage regular operations away from the homeland. We do not envisage such operations. Exigencies can be dealt with by special joint operations.

Joint operations need technology which enables the commander to control remote areas of influence. We do not have such technology. We have not laid sufficient stress on jointness in career progression. That means only those who have served on joint billets can be promoted beyond a certain level. Though a CDS is a must, first, we need to decide on the type of CDS we need. We need to start grooming personnel for joint operations and

**The public manifestation of faith in the new government is the massive mandate given to it in the recent elections. Every Indian expects it to set things right. Time is at a premium. It has taken over the reins of governance at a time when India's stock is low in the world in terms of credit rating.**

we need to start developing the necessary technology. The need of the hour is that the army requires tanks, howitzers, ammunition. The navy needs ships, submarines, torpedoes, missiles. The air force needs aircraft, missiles, radars. Let us complete ongoing contracts to restore and refurbish our fighting forces first before restructuring them.

So, on the CDS, let us start the debate and simultaneously develop technology. In three to five years, let the CDS look after budgeting and acquisitions for all the Services, besides Joint Commands, strategic weapons, intelligence. Most importantly, he needs to be the single point of military advice to the Raksha Mantri (RM) and the Prime Minister (PM). We should think of a parallel approach, with the defence secretary dealing with inter-ministry issues and the CDS with military issues. Will the government accept so much power vested in one military person? Will the bureaucracy permit such trespass on its traditional turf? These are questions we have to answer first.

## CONCLUSION

Indians do not have a national character. We do not have a national religion. We are not agreed upon a national language. We do not understand national interest. We do have national pride. We do not have a Brand India. We were ruled by foreigners for thousands of years and the scars manifest themselves in our behaviour. We got our independence with very little bloodshed thanks to the struggles of a few great men and women. So not everyone has felt the pain. We got democracy before literacy. Hence, we undervalue it. We are not responsible citizens and we do not take our duties and responsibilities as citizens seriously. It boggles the imagination that despite these impediments, we have continued as a successful democracy for more than 60 years. We are deeply emotional. Once we take someone

to our heart, we raise him to the highest pedestal, a demi-God. We can also drop him as easily, with no second thought.

The public manifestation of faith in the new government is the massive mandate given to it in the recent elections. Every Indian expects it to set things right. Time is at a premium. It has taken over the reins of governance at a time when India's stock is low in the world in terms of credit rating. The world economy is in a slowdown mode. El Nino has delayed the monsoon. The war in Iraq has affected oil. Prices of common goods are rising. The government has thousands of priorities in front of it and it knows that, finally, hard, unpalatable decisions will have to be taken.

This paper has sought to put some priorities, especially in the defence and security sectors, on paper. I am sure the government is aware of most of them. All priorities will have to measure up against a time graph. Some have to be done now. Some have to be started now for the effect to be felt later. Some will have to be sounded out against the political sounding board or the international environment. Some will have to be abandoned after a cost benefit analysis, to be tried out at a more propitious time.

Whatever be the method, it has to be a combined effort. Not only the government but the opposition too has to contribute to issues dealing with national interests. The whole country will have to learn to tighten its belt for some tough measures. We citizens will have to exert the national will to overcome the ills of corruption, delayed decisions and lack of governance. Remember, there is no magic wand. We have to be patient. We have to give the government sufficient time. I have no doubts that if each one of us exercises more discipline, does his own job sincerely and keeps national interest in mind, the good days will come and India will once again take its rightful place in the new world order.

