

SECURITY BEYOND SURVIVAL

ESSAYS FOR K. SUBRAHMANYAM

EDITOR

P.R. KUMARASWAMY



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NATIONAL SECURITY: A CRITIQUE

P.R. KUMARASWAMY*

... autonomy is a function of competence, knowledge and originality in thinking. Those who do not write, those who only repeat views already expressed elsewhere more forcefully, and those who only hide their lack of analytical capability behind a façade of normative platitudes cannot effectively utilise the autonomy available to them. This is the case all over the world and particularly in Indian academia and is reflected in the Institute [for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)] as well.

KS¹

If its tryst with destiny is survival, India survives. Since the midnight of 15 August 1947, when she won her freedom, India has traversed a considerable distance. Despite innumerable internal differences and political instability at the Centre, India survives as a country. In spite of incidences of inter-communal violence that have erupted several times since the riots that took place at the time of Partition, it succeeds in maintaining national cohesion. The widespread endorsement of secularism vindicates its basic opposition to religion-based politics. Intermittent political violence, which has been a hallmark of the Indian polity right from the time when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, has not affected the basic political unity of the nation. India has contained secessionist tendencies in Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and the north-east through skilful political manoeuvres with accommodation where possible and with repression where necessary. Through various forms

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of affirmative action and economic incentives it has been able to co-opt and uplift the deprived and backward segments of society. In the economic arena it is emerging as a major player in the global market and can now even afford to selectively abandon its proverbial begging bowl. Its progress in the arena of military technology has been impressive as have been its achievements in the spheres of nuclear, missile, and space technology.

Yet, if the goal is to go beyond just survival and to find a place in the sun, then India has miles to go. In spite of half a century of achievements in the political, economic, and military fields, one fact cannot be ignored: India's accomplishments are not commensurate with the potential and promises it held out in 1947. The gulf between potential and performance is particularly unbridgeable and yawning in the arena of foreign policy and security.

At the time of independence, Jawaharlal Nehru had visualised a resurgent Asia where India would play a central role. He confidently declared: 'India is going to be and bound to be a country that counts in world affairs, not I hope in a military sense, but in many other senses, which are more important and effective in the end.'² More than half a century after this prophecy, India is struggling to maintain its supremacy vis-à-vis Pakistan. Any dispassionate view cannot ignore the fact that since independence India's international standing and influence have only receded.

India is saddled with two nuclear rivals with whom it has serious and seemingly irresolvable border disputes. Moreover, China and Pakistan have a shared interest in containing India. Any Indian aspiration in Asia is predicated upon New Delhi evolving a *modus vivendi* with Beijing and China's acceptance of India's role beyond South Asia. Simultaneously, the ongoing violence in Jammu and Kashmir has tied India down and forced it to engage in a relentless struggle with Pakistan.

Furthermore, India's relations with its other neighbours are anything but cordial. Neither the assertive Indira Doctrine nor the conciliatory Gujral Doctrine succeeded in instilling trust among its neighbours. Apprehensions over India's 'hegemonic' intentions continue to undermine its influence in the region. It has serious political disputes, differences, or disagreements with all its neighbours. Consequently, shared concerns against India often unite the smaller states at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) fora.

India's claim for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council is taken seriously only by its citizens. For the rest of the world, India is merely a regional power of the impoverished human ocean called South Asia. It wants the international community to recognise, accept, and treat it as a nuclear power. Yet, it seeks benefits from international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as a developing country. Its ongoing campaign for membership of the Security Council has thus been accompanied, until now, by the periodic convening of donor conferences.

Having perceived itself to be an important international player at the time of independence, it is boxed down with no allies or friends in its immediate neighbourhood. Indeed, many Indians despair that their country fell from the high pedestal of importance and influence into the backwaters of South Asia. It continues to be an 'emerging' power more than two decades after Stephen Cohen and Richard Park first expounded the idea.³ India appears to be engaged in a restless search for a role and identity for itself. It is a member of mostly ineffective or moribund outfits such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Commonwealth, the G-15, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), and SAARC. It is still struggling to gain entry into more substantial groups such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

The indecision and vacillation over the American request for the deployment of troops in Iraq in 2003 epitomises the basic Indian approach to matters strategic. This was not the first time that India displayed its 'to be or not to be' attitude. That India even contemplated sending troops to Iraq in such circumstances has to be regarded as a significant departure from the past. It was widely believed both inside and outside the country that given its pro-American disposition, it would be easier for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government to join hands with Washington. It may be noted that, against national consensus, it was the BJP government that had endorsed the United States (US) national missile defence programme. Despite the near universal unpopularity of the American invasion of Iraq, the official Indian response was muted if not silent. Having invested considerably in improving Indo-US relations, especially following the nuclear tests, India's participation in US-dominated reconstruction of Iraq seemed logical. It would have been natural for the same government, which was all too willing to be the frontline state of the US in fighting international terrorism, to be supportive of American operations in Iraq.

Despite high hopes on both sides, eventually India backed out and even a unanimous Security Council resolution on the reconstruction of Iraq proved to be insufficient for New Delhi to oblige the Bush administration. The episode placed the country in the position where it has always been: willing to make a new beginning but unable to carry through the exercise and hence slipping into an all too familiar pattern of vacillation and no decision. There exists a gulf between its desires and abilities and the consequences of an action are not thought through seriously before making commitments. As a result, spouting moral platitudes and rationalising policy choices are seen as being preferable to charting a new course, which may or may not promote national interest.

This behaviour on foreign and security policies is singularly Indian and is not peculiar to the Congress or the BJP, the dominant political parties in contemporary India. Even when the latter has sought to move away from this, as underscored by the Iraqi episode, the traditional mindset and the unwillingness to take risks have hampered India from recognising its position and influence in the international arena. Failure to recognise the disparity between perceived self-importance and actual international influence has been a constant fixture in India's response to strategic issues. This dichotomy has received considerable attention from scholars and many have chronicled India's several shortcomings and the *faux pas* it has committed over the years. In fact, some scholars have highlighted India's lack of a strategic culture⁴ or in more general terms its permanent ad hocism.⁵

One can easily take refuge in India's accomplishments, be self-content, indulge in homilies, and contribute to a feel-good factor. However, it is essential to be critical, even at the risk of being far-fetched lest one lives under illusions and harbours a false sense of security. Even if it means being politically incorrect, it is essential to ask certain uncomfortable questions: Why does India find itself isolated regionally and ignored globally?

HOW SECURE IS INDIA?

The country does not enjoy well-defined secure borders, lacks internal peace and stability, and is yet to attain a cohesive national identity. It

is entangled in several major and minor territorial problems with most of its neighbours. Besides China and Pakistan, it also has unresolved border issues with Bangladesh and Myanmar. In the domestic arena, it has endured many violent secessionist movements and there continue to be spates of insurgency, terrorism, and other forms of political violence.

India's survival and its ability to reasonably maintain its autonomy and territorial integrity cannot be assumed to be secure. What then constitutes national security? This seemingly simple question eludes definition. Barry Buzan has come closest to providing a comprehensive definition. For Buzan national security is

the ability of states and societies to maintain the independence of their life and their identity. The dynamics ... of security arise from the interplay of the threats and vulnerabilities that affect these goals. The bottom line is survival, but security also reasonably includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence.

He identifies five factors which affect national security, namely, military, political, economic, societal, and environmental factors.⁶

Ironically, at the macro level, India's performance appears impressive. But its infrastructure, large scientific manpower, industrial base, and its current economic growth and development present a somewhat misleading picture when compared with its sectoral performance. It is the same case with national security. Despite its military might and nuclearisation, the country has failed to achieve any semblance of stability and peace with its neighbours. In the five decades after independence it has fought five major wars that exclude its military fiasco in Sri Lanka and its myriad internal turmoils.

While terrorism and Pakistan receive widespread attention, most of the threats to national security are domestic and in some cases external adversaries thrive on discords within the country. Since the time of the partition various forms of political violence have manifested themselves in different parts of India. In spite of the late entry of terrorism into the political lexicon, one cannot ignore the fact that internal violence has been a part of the Indian polity since the time of the partition. For long, domestic violence in different parts of the country, especially the northeast, was not seen as terrorism. Despite

the nomenclature, political, social, ideological, communal, or caste-based violence continues to engulf the country.

A close examination of Buzan's other categories—social, economic, and environmental security—leaves one equally confused, if not cynical. The failure to create bonds of national unity transcending caste, religious, linguistic, and other primordial cleavages has given way to an atmosphere of divisiveness and tension. The nation's granaries overflow with food grains while many segments of the society suffer from malnutrition, poverty, and hunger. Societal cleavages have started affecting the polity and are robbing it of its stability.

Even if one were to confine national security within a military-strategic prism and overlook internal security, economic development, and social cohesion, the progress achieved by the nation has been dismal. The question then arises, how much of this is self-inflicted, imposed, or inevitable?

NEITHER IDEALISM NOR REALISM

The non-violent nature of the struggle against the British tremendously influenced the future trajectory of India's foreign and security policies. As a result, key issues such as a non-aligned foreign policy, peaceful coexistence, decolonisation, anti-imperialism, and global peace and security have tended to be perceived and presented through a prism of ethics, morality, and principles. Before long, non-alignment, which K. Subrahmanyam describes as 'a modernised version of the classical balance of power', came to be reduced to a slogan.⁷

The influence of idealism is somewhat exaggerated in two components of India's foreign policy, namely, non-violence and non-alignment. Under closer scrutiny both appear to be more of a pragmatic choice than a principled stand. Despite the moral arguments, *ahimsa* as propagated by Mahatma Gandhi was a reflection of the limitations of the nationalist struggle. Given the overwhelming military might of the British and divisiveness within, any other option would have resulted in a violent and protracted conflict if not the crushing defeat of the nationalists or the Balkanisation of India. Moreover, Mahatma Gandhi did not hesitate in endorsing the use of force against the Pakistani insurgents in Kashmir soon after the partition. Likewise, the polarised nature of the post-war world left India

with limited space for manoeuvre and any involvement in the Euro-centric Cold War would have resulted either in the erosion of its newly won political freedom or in a costly arms race and hence the adoption of the non-aligned foreign policy.

The strong emphasis on moral arguments naturally calls for a closer scrutiny of India's actions. Ever since its formal enunciation in the India-China Agreement on Tibet and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India in 1954, *panchsheel* became a cornerstone of Indian diplomatic policies. Among others, it explicitly called for 'mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs'. Even if one were to overlook the context in which the idea was conceived and consecrated, India did not make this principle an article of faith. Though never explicitly stated, Nehru and his successors conveniently overlooked the principle of non-interference. By ignoring or condoning a number of actions taken by the Soviet Union, India severely undermined its claims to idealism in international relations. Nehru's refusal to condemn the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 against the backdrop of his strong criticism of the Suez crisis evoked strong protest and opposition not only in the international arena but also from his critics at home. Likewise, India's uncritical position vis-à-vis the crisis in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan a decade later are examples of practice being at variance with principles.

Moreover, the track record of India's non-interference in its immediate neighbourhood is less than flattering. Despite formal denials, India's policy vis-à-vis its neighbours reflects a great power mentality. As George Tanham argued, India failed 'to understand, or reluctantly accept, a neighbour's need to use foreigners to offset India's dominating influence as they do not see themselves as a threat to their neighbours.'⁸ By expecting the smaller states to be 'grateful' for its help and assistance, India at times has adopted a patronising posture. At one level, it expects a quid pro quo relationship for its 'help' in the liberation of Bangladesh or for the preservation of monarchy in Nepal while it resents similar great power demands upon India.⁹

One could extend this argument further and suggest that because of its size, India has been unable to understand the security dilemmas facing smaller states and the resultant extra-regional linkages that these small states are forced to maintain. The need for states such as Kuwait and Jordan in the Middle East or Singapore in Southeast Asia to maintain strong politico-military ties with the West were rarely understood, let alone appreciated in New Delhi.

On a number of occasions India has directly or indirectly interfered in the domestic affairs of its smaller neighbours. At one time or another, insurgents from Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar have received political patronage as well as moral and material support from India. Sometimes such actions involved official connivance and on others the government of the day turned a blind eye to them. By offering safe haven to these groups and individuals who were on the wrong side of the law in their respective countries, Indian leaders have undermined one of the basic principles of panchsheel. Similarly, the role of non-violence in Indian foreign policy is also questionable. Its policies on Hyderabad, Junagadh, Kashmir, or Goa have been anything but non-violent and India's active military involvement was instrumental in the formation of Bangladesh.

Was there, then, realism in India's foreign and security policies? The verdict once again is in the negative. Three sets of examples would elaborate the argument further. A number of its decisions which were extremely popular in the immediate aftermath did not further Indian interests. Realism by its very nature expects a serious assessment of pros and cons based on reliable information. As a state policy, realism has no room for sentiments or normative principles and it is guided solely by 'national interest'.

India played a significant role in the entry of the People's Republic of China into the comity of nations. It even threatened, at one time, to boycott the Bandung Afro-Asian Summit Conference if communist China was excluded. During this period, the concept of '*Hindi-Chini bhai bhai*' dominated Indian policies on China. This was exclusively an Indian coinage, slogan, and perception, which was not shared by the Chinese and when it became the Indian policy, it resulted in the Indian tragedy. The short-sightedness of this policy proved to be a strategic disaster in 1962 when China, through a calculated military action, brought about strategic and far-reaching political humiliation upon India. More than four decades later, India is yet to fully recover from this debacle.

Second, in some cases, consistent policies proved to be a strategic liability. At the height of its anti-colonial phase, India warmly embraced a number of national liberation struggles, which espoused armed resistance and other forms of violence. India at this stage supported even blatant acts of terrorism as legitimate means of national liberation. Despite the Gandhian ethos, it was prepared to understand if not condone, the deliberate killing of innocent civilians in the name

of national liberation. This liberal attitude largely manifested itself in India's approach to the Palestinian struggle. It, however, boomeranged at home with the outbreak of large-scale violence in Punjab in the 1980s and Kashmir since 1990. The cycle of violence, which often manifested itself in political assassinations, fundamentally altered the Indian position on terrorism and compelled it to re-examine its erstwhile support for terrorist acts by national liberation movements. The support that the Khalistani and Kashmiri militants received from Pakistan similarly forced India to re-examine its approach towards political violence that targeted innocent civilians.

Third, the Bangladesh liberation war can be cited as the most appropriate example of strategic short-sightedness. The Indian role in the war was so popular domestically that even the Jan Sangh, a vociferous critic of Indira Gandhi, rallied around the Congress leader. Its role in transforming the history as well as the geography of the subcontinent was widely praised in India and the management of the crisis was seen as an example of decisive political leadership. In hindsight, however, the perceived gains proved to be transient and it was a case of tactical gains adversely affecting strategic objectives. It is possible that East Pakistan might have seceded even without India's involvement but by hastening and facilitating the break-up, India earned the perennial wrath of Pakistan. The formation of Bangladesh freed Pakistan from additional commitments in the east and enabled it concentrate entirely on the Kashmir front. Despite the initial setbacks, the formation of Bangladesh provided a strategic cohesion, identity, and political direction for Pakistan. Till then, Pakistan had been looking towards Southeast Asia as well as the Middle East for allies. Over the years, not only has Bangladesh's appreciation for India's 'help' in the liberation war diminished but it has also become closer to Pakistan.

This neither idealist nor realist posture is most evident with regard to its nuclear policy.

NUCLEAR POLICY

The stinging criticisms of the opposition in the immediate aftermath of the Pokhran-II tests might give the impression that by exercising the nuclear option, the BJP-led coalition broke the prolonged national

consensus on the nuclear question. The charges against the BJP ranged from blatant militarism of Hindu extremism to the abrogation of the Gandhian tradition of non-violence. The picture, however, exhibits the larger dichotomy between India's international posture and its domestic nuclear strategy.

For long, India's focus primarily revolved around the commitments towards general and complete nuclear disarmament as well as on the discriminatory nature of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Great powers converted, as Subrahmanyam argued, the NPT 'into [a treaty] licensing unlimited nuclear proliferation to the five nuclear weapon powers with a total ban on acquisition of nuclear weapons by all other nations'.¹⁰ India argued that it was not willing to be a party to an inherently discriminatory treaty, which institutionalised nuclear apartheid. This contrasted with the position of Israel and Pakistan, which refused to join the NPT due to national security considerations.

However, as the Kargil Review Committee made clear, this public anti-nuclear posture based on Gandhian non-violence was primarily meant for external consumption. While insisting on nuclear ambiguity, simultaneously Nehru and his successors adopted a realist attitude vis-à-vis the nuclear bomb, perhaps as a 'necessary evil' in defence of vital national interests. India's demand for nuclear disarmament in the international arena was thus accompanied by a national weaponisation programme. *The Kargil Report* formally admitted: 'The Indian nuclear programme was *weapon-oriented at least since 1983*. All Prime Ministers since then had provided unreserved support to the development of nuclear weapons and a matching delivery system'¹¹ (emphasis added). With the sole and noticeable exception of Morarji Desai, since the days of Nehru, all Prime Ministers have endorsed, encouraged, funded, and facilitated the weaponisation process.¹² As former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao told the Kargil Committee, the weaponisation process was completed before the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1996.¹³ As a result, India earned the distinction of being 'the only country in the world to deny it had the (nuclear) weapons when they had been in existence for years'.¹⁴ Indeed Rajiv Gandhi's much publicised six nation, five continent disarmament initiative of 1986 was preceded by definitive moves towards weaponisation.

Even on the issue of motives, Indian explanation is less than convincing as much of its focus was on Pakistan. Writing after the Pokhran-II tests, Subrahmanyam identified the October 1964 Chinese nuclear

tests as 'one of the defining moments in the history of Indian nuclear policy'.¹⁵ In spite of this, however, for over three decades, Pakistani rather than the Chinese nuclear programme remained the prime Indian obsession and in the words of Tanham, China 'has had a nuclear capability for three decades, *but this has not caused the Indians to worry greatly*'¹⁶ (emphasis added). Reflecting a similar view, in December 1987, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi remarked: 'We co-existed with the Chinese bomb for 20 years, but a Pakistani bomb? I don't know and I cannot be sure that we will be able to co-exist with it'.¹⁷ Even the Chinese role in forcing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) regime upon it did not alter the fundamental Indian reluctance if not unwillingness to confront the reality. As a result, when it sought to justify the 1998 nuclear tests within the Chinese context, it sounded like a *post facto* rationalisation and led to a major diplomatic row with China.

Thus, as long as the dual 'public-disarmament-but-private-armament' or 'international-disarmament-but-national-weaponisation' posture was maintained, the official policy of keeping the nuclear option open enjoyed widespread support inside the country. By going nuclear, the BJP deliberately or otherwise, shattered the duality. As a result, if the BJP could not claim exclusive monopoly over the nuclear tests, the opposition parties also could not disassociate themselves from Pokhran-II. The process of developing India's nuclear capability was initiated by Nehru and nurtured by his Congress as well as non-Congress successors.

Even in terms of realism, the international debates over nuclear weapons, which enabled India to seek a moral high ground, resulted in India pushing itself into a corner. Through inducement or intimidation, the great powers have internationalised the non-proliferation regime and the near universal endorsement of NPT was also an Indian failure to convince the rest of the world of the hegemonic aspirations of the nuclear haves.

At times, consistency got India into serious troubles in the nuclear arena. For long, it has been a strong advocate of nuclear weapon free zones (NWFZ) in various parts of the world and so long as such zones were created in far off areas, India could justify this as a move towards nuclear disarmament. It began recognising the negative fallout of this approach when Pakistan sought to declare South Asia as a NWFZ and in 1978 India was forced to take a u-turn on the concept of NWFZs thereby underscoring the strategic fallouts of consistency.

If neither lofty idealism nor hard realism shapes Indian policy, then what does? Ironic as it may sound, perennial ad hocism appears to be the basic Indian posture on strategic issues. What begins as a temporary measure to accommodate a person, a viewpoint, or position is gradually entrenched as formal policy and is rationalised. It is always a question of actions in search of reasons rather than vice-versa. The issue therefore is not idealism or consistency but a constant and unending process of review of strategic issues and policies. Because international relations is not static, it is essential that even when things appear to be going along expected lines, policy makers institutionalise a constant process of review and re-examination. Instead of adopting a strategic view of the changing reality, India has settled for ad hocism and has perfected it into a national trait.

What then contributes to this permanent ad hocism in Indian national security policies?

BYPASSING INSTITUTIONS

Since the early 1920s, Jawaharlal Nehru remained the undisputed architect, articulator, and practitioner of Indian foreign policy. His virtual monopoly in defining India's place among the comity of nations not only lasted for over 40 years but continued to dominate the Indian foreign policy even after his death in 1964. On the domestic front, he did face stiff opposition both inside and outside the Congress Party but external relations were different. None of his colleagues, contemporaries, or critics had the knowledge let alone inclination to seriously confront his foreign policy.¹⁸ Even the Sino-Indian debacle did not erode his diplomatic space and he completely dominated the foreign and security policies with limited consultations with his colleagues and subordinates. His dual role as India's foreign minister further eroded any room for deliberations, consultations, or alternative viewpoints. This Nehruvian tradition continued for a long time and foreign policy has remained the exclusive prerogative of the Prime Minister who often doubles as the Minister of External Affairs as did P.V. Narasimha Rao and I.K. Gujral, for example.

Moreover, another feature contributed to the centralisation of decision making with the Prime Minister. Despite the collective responsibility of the Cabinet, Prime Ministers have often functioned as

elected executives surrounded by a small group of advisers. The hand-picked group of advisers alone have been part of and privy to sensitive strategic decisions taken by the prime minister, which were formally endorsed later by the Cabinet.¹⁹ Because they are answerable and accountable only to the prime minister, their advice and suggestions tended to circumvent normal democratic institutions as well as parliamentary oversight. Especially since Indira Gandhi's ascendance, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is perceived by many as an extra-constitutional authority.

Even when institutions are in place, proximity to and personal equations with the top political echelons enable the bureaucracy to bypass if not supersede the normal chain of command. As J.N. Dixit candidly admits in his memoirs, Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao was not favourable to the idea of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of 1987, which later resulted in India fighting the Tamil militants culminating in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by a female suicide bomber belonging to the LTTE. According to Dixit,

Narasimha Rao made three points about the whole process of negotiations (on the text of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord) about to start. First, we should not rush into this agreement. Second, we should carefully consider the wisdom of being direct signatories to this Agreement. He was of the view that Sri Lankan Tamils should sign the agreement with Sri Lankan Government and we should just be the guarantors. Thirdly, he felt that we must very carefully assess whether the willingness of the LTTE and Sri Lankan Government to come to an agreement at that point of time was based on a genuine desire for peace and a durable settlement or was it just an interim tactical move.²⁰

Not only did the eventual agreement ignore these suggestions, Rao did not prevail upon Rajiv Gandhi and warn him of the possible consequences of a hasty agreement.

On the more specific question of establishing a National Security Council, the process has been fraught with delays and indecisions. The Council that was reconstituted in 1999, more than three decades after Subrahmanyam first expounded the idea, is still in its infancy and 'is more a shadow than the substance. Its utility and effectiveness are questionable'.²¹

LACK OF CONSENSUS

On a number of occasions both the government and principal opposition parties worked together on sensitive issues. The Jan Sangh, the forerunner of the BJP and a strong critic of Indira Gandhi, endorsed and hailed her handling of the Bangladesh crisis. Similarly, Narasimha Rao sent Vajpayee as the leader of the Indian delegation to a United Nations (UN) meet. The visit of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in September 2003 brought forth another occasion of national consensus. When most of the opposition parties protested against his visit, Congress President Sonia Gandhi chose to meet him and distanced herself from the partisan considerations of smaller parties.

At the same time, India is yet to evolve a tradition of bi-partisan consensus on sensitive national security issues. National security debates, like many other issues, have been highly politicised and political parties take diametrically opposite stands depending on whether they are in power or in the opposition. Even during the times of Nehru, consensus on foreign policy issues was arrived at very slowly and painfully. Consensus over non-aligned foreign policy was not any easier and until the election of the Janata Government in 1977, the noticeable Indian tilt towards Moscow was strongly resented by the Right. During much of the 1980s, India's Sri Lanka policy remained a hostage to Dravidian party politics in Tamil Nadu and Rajiv Gandhi's economic blockade against Nepal in the late 1980s did not enjoy the support of the opposition, either. The polarisation of opinions on the illegal migration of Bangladeshis to India largely emanates from partisan political calculations.

The divisions were clearly visible in the internal debates over the nuclear tests. If the Right questioned the wisdom and political motives of Indira Gandhi in 1974, the Congress and Left parties challenged the motives of the BJP in conducting the 1998 tests. The highly politicised nature of the whole process, the desire of the BJP to claim exclusive credit for the whole operation, and the domestic political calculations compelled many parties, groups, and individuals to vehemently oppose the nuclear tests. While the BJP-led government fulfilled his long-time advocacy for nuclear tests, Subrahmanyam was also critical of its parochial approach in claiming complete credit for it.

Not content with his public reservations, he challenged the BJP's claims of monopoly and recorded:

... beginning with Indira Gandhi, successive Prime Ministers displayed extreme sensitivity towards the nuclear issue and consistently supported an Indian nuclear weapons programme. They judged it necessary to envelop it in the utmost secrecy and consistently did not take their own party colleagues, the Armed Forces and senior civil servants into confidence. This has caused many in the country to believe that India's nuclear weaponisation programme is a departure from the traditional policy of merely keeping the nuclear option open indefinitely. The record must be set straight. The contribution of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, V.P. Singh, Chandra Shekhar, Narasimha Rao, Deve Gowda and Inder Gujral to India's emergence as a nuclear weapon state, and the compulsions on them to ensure this, should be made known. The record clearly establishes that the Indian nuclear weapons programme had a much wider consensus than is generally believed.²²

The *Kargil Report* maintained that but for the progress made in previous years, 'Pokhran-II could not have been conducted within a short period of less than two months [after the BJP coalition government assumed office]; the process had started a long time ago.'²³

In short, while the BJP could not claim exclusive credit for the tests, the critics of the nuclear test could not absolve themselves of their 'responsibility' in the development of India's nuclear weapons programme either.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

Despite its modernity, the oral tradition continues to dominate sensitive national decisions. When the Janata Government sought to trace out the rationale behind the 1974 tests, it 'could not do that since the decision was not on paper'.²⁴ Sensitive national decisions, especially in the nuclear arena, were confined to prime ministers with the rest of political leadership, the armed forces, and the bureaucracy remaining

completely out of the process.²⁵ The foreign ministry according to Subrahmanyam 'had no knowledge of the Indian weaponisation programme and they were not informed about the goal of India acquiring a full, balanced nuclear deterrent capability'.²⁶

While historians like S. Gopal were given partial access, half a century later, much of the foreign policy documents pertaining to even the late 1940s remain classified. The failure to declassify official documents after the statutory 30-year period impedes any serious academic rigour towards the understanding of national security matters. Subrahmanyam aptly summed up the prevailing state of the Indian bureaucracy, especially the superannuated bureaucrats, who have suddenly become the champions of transparency. In his words, 'Some of those who while in office refused permission for the ... [IDSA] to conduct studies, now after their retirement have become great protagonists of freedom of information and advocates of non-official studies'.²⁷

Prevalence of excessive and unnecessary secrecy keeps much of the official history of India's military experiences away from public scrutiny. The absence of official historiography, which plagued the reconstruction of ancient Indian history, continues to haunt contemporary India. When other countries are experiencing the phenomenon of 'revisionist historiography', which challenges and destroys earlier and sanitised official versions of a sensitive past, India is yet to present an authentic version of its past. Indeed, official commissions such as the Henderson-Brookes Report (which went into India's China debacle) are safely buried in government archives. Seen in this larger context, the commercial publication of the sanitised version of *The Kargil Review Committee Report* appears to be an exception rather than the rule.

The excessive reliance on oral tradition is compounded by the near total absence of oral history. This historical tradition, which could fill much of the knowledge gap on important national security issues is singularly absent in India. Oral history can offer only a partial picture of individuals involved in decision making and lacks official sanctity and yet it provides an important source material for understanding history and the decision-making process. In the absence of documentation of oral history, most decision makers would be taking their knowledge to their graves and would be depriving the future generations of the benefit of their knowledge and experience.

INSTITUTIONAL INADEQUACY

National security debates in India have been seriously hampered by the generalist nature of the Indian bureaucracy. If the politicians are 'mostly municipal politicians with very Indian understanding of the dynamics of international politics',²⁸ the bureaucracy suffers from the tradition of Vikramaditya's throne whereby wisdom and expertise are not acquired through dedication and toil but are 'embedded in the chair a person occupies'.²⁹ A retired general aptly summed up the situation when he said: 'The Defence Secretary is a bureaucrat, who would be posted from Animal Husbandry Department and would be going on to Culture.'³⁰ As a consequence, with notable and rare exceptions, the permanent bureaucracy has become too career-oriented to offer rational policy options to the frequently changing political leadership.

Given the constant flux within, the ability of the government to seek outside expertise is also limited. Indeed, despite the proliferation of notionally non-official centres and institutes, most of them rely on the state exchequer for their survival. Public funding inevitably comes with a price tag, namely, political correctness.

Public funding and proximity to the establishment have blunted many nominally autonomous strategic think tanks and transformed them into yet another wing of the government. Even if one were to take a charitable view of this dependence, they have not developed the necessary expertise to offer alternative policy options to the government. Far from being the torch-bearers of strategic debates, over the years, they have been systematically co-opted by the establishment. Despite generous public funding, most have failed to live up to expectations. Indeed, these premier institutions have failed to present convincing rationale let alone viable policy options for India on important strategic issues. Even in areas where national interests are not at stake, these institutions habitually follow the government. Their failure to exercise their autonomy and articulate positions that are at variance with the government are unpardonable in a democracy. But it is altogether wrong to put the blame on the government because one has to constantly test the tolerance limits of the establishment—a trait which Subrahmanyam symbolises.

The idea of privately-funded think tanks is still new to India, despite the presence of a sizeable section of well-trained academics, defence and foreign policy practitioners, and a large and intelligent audience. Institutions which have come up in recent years have yet to make their mark. Thanks to the dearth of academics and civilian scholars, these institutions are dominated by former bureaucrats and retired generals who tend to reflect official positions. To that extent 'private' institutions are robbed of their identity, which ought to be distinct from publicly-funded think tanks. Some of the smaller think tanks which have been active in recent years have been sponsored, funded, sustained, or backed by foreign funding agencies. Though active, especially on issues such as Indo-Pakistan relations, track-two diplomacy, or confidence building measures (CBM), their external linkages unfortunately place them at a disadvantage as they are seen to be promoting the agenda of the sponsors.

UNINSPIRING ACADEMIA

The ad hocism towards national security is also partially a result of the unprofessionalism shown by India's strategic community, including the academia. Indian national security debates have been dominated by Western scholars or Indians based in the West. Despite the prolonged nuclear debate, proliferation of scholars and unending stream of writings, two of the classic works on India's nuclear policy have been written by Western scholars. If George Perkovich³¹ provided an in-depth understanding of the past, Ashley Tellis³² offered a concrete vision of the future. Under this situation former Indian diplomat C. Dasgupta's *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir, 1947-48*³³ is a pioneering work in assessing the most critical phase in independent India. This widely acclaimed primary scholarship was possible despite the secrecy surrounding official documents because it relied largely on British Archives and the India Office Library in London.

Even when official documents are declassified in other countries, there is a general reluctance among the Indian academia, especially those specialising on foreign policy, to take cognisance of them. The apathy towards declassified Russian documents following the disintegration of the Soviet Union is a classic example. Despite the long

political, economic, and strategic ties between the two countries, primary works on Indo-Soviet relations are still limited and secondary. Declassified Soviet documents, for example, reveal how senior communist leaders periodically sought and obtained financial contributions from the Soviet Union for their party's activities in India.³⁴ The absence of internationally recognised Indian journals on security issues does not help matters much and indeed the concept of refereed journal still remains nascent for much of the Indian intelligentsia.

India still remains oblivious to the concept of introspection, especially of events, which went wrong. While there were many personal and personalised accounts of India's debacle in Sri Lanka, no official account of the disaster exists in the public domain. Even the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, which was primarily a result of India's peace-keeping role in Sri Lanka, did not generate any serious official or academic attempt to answer a simple question: *what went wrong?*

The absence of rigorous, periodic, and informed interactions among the proponents, practitioners, and students of national security is another lacuna. The follies of wishful thinking were vindicated when much of the Indian intelligentsia was confident of a non-military option during the Kuwait crisis of 1990–91. As a result, the well-trained academia operates with fossilised or non-existent data. Flooded with data, the practitioner gropes without a framework. Thus the field is left to instant experts who can theoretically comment on anything, from malaria eradication to thermo-nuclear explosion.

CONCLUSION

With India's security and its approach to security, too much is wrong within rather than without. As its quest for great power status exemplifies, its quest is not just of survival but to play a pre-eminent role in global politics. However, India is not yet ready to play such a role. It lacks institutional cohesion in the sense that the various branches of the government, the academia, and the public do not share a common vision or strategy to realise that vision. One aspect that baffles any observer is India's unwillingness to take risks in pursuing its national interests. It is possible that some decisions could be counterproductive,

others may prove to be disastrous. The point is that no progress is possible without taking risks.

The nuclearisation has not fundamentally made India secure, and given its proclivity to project itself as a developing country, the tests have not enhanced its international standing either. Even though China is in a similar situation, it still manages to be treated as great power. This situation is largely a reflection of China's willingness to assert its position and face the consequences. India's democratic tradition, however, makes its task more difficult as contending view points have to be taken into consideration. Thus, the process of finding a common national position is all the more difficult for India than it is for China.

At best, nuclearisation has provided India a temporary strategic depth vis-à-vis the global constellation of powers. It is entirely up to India to exploit this window of opportunity, to rearrange its priorities in order to enhance its economic progress, bring about greater social cohesion and political stability.

NOTES

1. K. Subrahmanyam, 'IDSA-II: The Early Years', *Strategic Analysis*, August 1990, p. 580.
2. Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Government of India, Publication Division, 1983), p. 47.
3. Stephen Cohen and Richard L. Park, *India: Emergent Power?* (New York: Crane, Russack, 1979). While Cohen dropped the question mark from the title of his later book and merely called it *India: Emerging Power* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), the edited volume by Sumit Ganguly is titled, *India as an Emerging Power* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).
4. George K. Tanham, *Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretative Essay* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1992).
5. *The Kargil Review Committee Report* lamented: 'An objective assessment of the last 52 years will show that the country is lucky to have scraped through various national security threats without too much damage, except in 1962. The country can no longer afford such ad hoc functioning.' *From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report* (New Delhi: Sage, 2000), p. 259. See also, Chris Smith, *India's Ad hoc Arsenal: Direction or Drift in Defence Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
6. Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup, Pierre Lemaitre, Elebieta Tromer and Ole Waever, *The European Security Order Recast: Scenarios for the Post-Cold War Era* (London: Pinter, 1990). pp. 3-4.

7. K. Subrahmanyam, 'Introduction', in Jaswant Singh, *Defending India* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), p. ix.
8. George K. Tanham, 'Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay', in Kanti P. Bajpai and Amitabh Mattoo (eds), *Securing India: Strategic Thought and Practice* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), p. 53.
9. An American criticism of Nehru in his heydays of international respect and acclaim aptly sums up the Indian dichotomy:

Americans do not much mind Mr. Nehru's condemnation of American materialism; they themselves think it has been overdone. But they may be uncharitable enough to have read without profound sympathy his recent plaintive comment about another country's lack of gratitude for the aid which it had received from India. Speaking of Nepal's hostility, he said: 'That is what we are getting in exchange for all the friendship and help we have given in the last ten years or so.' On the whole, however, homilies on spiritual versus material values, East and West, or doubts as to whether sufficient recognition is given the role played by American material prosperity in keeping India's five-year plan going, leave American unruffled Occasions when Indian delegates take a middle-of-the-road positions, attempt to modify Soviet measures or vote against them have unfortunately attracted less attention than the occasions when Mr. Krishna Menon's zeal as grand marshal of the Asian and African states has resulted in their lining up against some western measure.

Hamilton Fish Armstrong, 'UN on Trial', *Foreign Affairs* (New York), Vol. 39, No. 3, April 1961, pp. 401-2.

10. K. Subrahmanyam, 'Indian Nuclear Policy—1964-98: A Personal Recollection', in Jasjit Singh (ed.), *Nuclear India* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 1998), p. 28.
11. *Kargil Review Committee Report*, p. 206.
12. Shortly after assuming office, Desai declared: 'I will give it to you in writing that we will not manufacture nuclear weapons. Even if the whole world arms itself with the bomb we will not do so.' Quoted in *Kargil Review Committee Report*, p. 203.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
14. K. Subrahmanyam, 'Indian Nuclear Policy', p. 48.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
16. George K. Tanham, 'Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay', p. 100.
17. Quoted in A.G. Noorani, 'Rajiv Gandhi's Nuclear Policy', *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), 11 April 1988. On another occasion he told a German news agency: 'Pakistan having a nuclear weapon is not quite the same as some other country having a nuclear weapon. We have lived with the Chinese nuclear bomb and not developed our own weapon for many years now. So it is not that we can't live with a nuclear neighbour.' *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 6 June 1988.
18. In the words of Stephen Cohen, 'Even though Nehru encouraged debate on foreign policy issues, few politically strong figures could challenge him on the floor of Parliament Nehru was a one-man policy planning staff and coordinator, as well as the source of major initiatives that put India on the world's

diplomatic map There was no need for institutional development in the foreign policy when Nehru combined both expertise and political power.' Stephen Cohen, *India: Emerging Power*, p. 69.

19. Reflecting on the situation prior to the 1962 war with China, P.V.R. Rao remarked: 'important issues were considered ad hoc by the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, the Chief of the Army Staff and some senior Army Officers And the Defence Committee of the Cabinet was appraised of decisions mostly post facto.' *Defence without Drift* (New Delhi: Popular Prakashan, 1970), pp. 307-9.
20. J.N. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo* (New Delhi: Konark, 1998), pp. 119-20.
21. D. Shyam Babu, 'India's National Security Council: Stuck in the Cradle?' *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 34, No. 2, June 2003, p. 227.
22. *Kargil Review Committee Report*, pp. 259-60.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
24. Subrahmanyam, 'Indian Nuclear Policy', p. 30.
25. Former Defence Minister Sharad Pawar appears to be an exception.
26. Subrahmanyam, 'Indian Nuclear Policy', p. 48.
27. Subrahmanyam, 'The Birth of IDSA', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 13, No. 4, July 1990, p. 470.
28. Subrahmanyam, 'Indian Nuclear Policy', p. 48.
29. Subrahmanyam, 'Introduction', p. xxv.
30. *India Today*, 30 April 1993, p. 30.
31. George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).
32. Ashley Tellis, *India: Emerging Nuclear Posture between Deterrent and Ready Arsenal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
33. C. Dasgupta, *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir, 1947-48* (New Delhi: Sage, 2002).
34. *Cold War International History Research Project Bulletin* (Woodrow Wilson Centre, Washington), Issues 8 and 9, Winter 1996-97, pp. 262-63.