

SECURITY BEYOND SURVIVAL

ESSAYS FOR K. SUBRAHMANYAM

EDITOR

P.R. KUMARASWAMY



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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL: YET ANOTHER AD HOC MOVE?

D. SHYAM BABU*

Demands to rectify several lacunae in India's higher defence management have been a recurrent theme since the country's defeat in the Sino-Indian war of 1962. Institutional mechanisms, devised at the time of independence in 1947, to manage national security were found to be either inadequate or ignored by the top political leadership. Failure to attend to this vital area was one of the main reasons that contributed to the humiliation of 1962. While there is broad consensus on this among opinion makers¹ and the opposition parties, the government never went beyond increasing the annual defence budget in the immediate aftermath of the war. For example, the defence budget for 1963–64 was almost twice that of the previous year and thereafter strengthening the nation's defence capabilities had been accorded priority. But, save a few defence ministry-level reforms, no institutional reforms were undertaken.

However, the 1990s witnessed two attempts by the government to bring about reforms in the national security apparatus. First, it introduced the parliamentary committee system in 1992–93, broadly based on the American model, to improve legislative supervision over key areas of governance. As part of this exercise, the Parliamentary Standing Committees were constituted² for, among others, defence, external affairs, home affairs, and finance, which are broadly concerned with

* An abridged version of this essay, titled 'India's National Security Council: Struck in the Cradle?', was published in *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 34, No. 2, June 2003, pp. 215–30. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications Ltd. Copyright International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), 2003.

national security. By and large, the new system has proved to be successful, and it would require some more time to emerge as a vital element in India's governance.

Second, a National Security Council (NSC) was set up in 1990 but it did not take off. The NSC was constituted again in 1999. One prominent analyst felt the need for 'an agency which has access to inputs from a wide range of sources, expertise amongst its members in specialized fields and, a coordinating head to harmonize the views to obtain worthwhile options. Such an agency should be aware of the security issues but not be involved in managing them, the latter being a function of the executive.'³ At the time of setting up the NSC, the government declared that, 'national security management requires integrated thinking and coordinated application of the political, military, diplomatic, scientific and technological resources....'⁴

While it may appear to be too early to assess the *working* of the 4-year-old NSC, the context in which it was introduced, its structure, and the tasks it is expected to fulfil call for a preliminary assessment. The nuclearisation of India (and Pakistan), on the other hand, undoubtedly adds a new dimension in that the country can no longer put aside issues like how it plans to tackle national security concerns. An attempt is made here to determine the institutional location of the NSC as well as its other bodies—such as the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and National Security Adviser—and the role they are called upon to play; and the role of an NSC in India's parliamentary system of government. Is there an institutional 'gap' that only an NSC must fill? Moreover, the NSC is a response to the widely expressed need that India should pay attention to long-term strategic planning. Implicit in this is the assumption, only partly true, that India lacks both the tradition and, as a result, institutions to carry out long-term threat assessments and strategies to meet them.

The real question is how far does the creation of the NSC amount to a welcome departure from the perceived confused thinking and disused institutions? Can it be called a departure at all?

STRATEGIC CULTURE

In 1989, *Time* magazine commented that India was frenetically building its military muscle without knowing—or, without telling

others—what the purpose behind the build-up was.⁵ And when RAND Corporation analyst George Tanham argued in an article in 1992 that India had no 'strategic culture' and that it lacked a long-term national security strategy,⁶ even those who challenged his assumption found it difficult to locate or explain what the country's long-term strategy was. One line of argument, reassuring to Indians, was that not having a declaratory policy did not amount to not having a policy. India might not have a declared policy that can be found in a document but it would be incorrect to say that it has no long-term policy. The Defence Secretary told the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence in February 1994 that:

It is true that we do not have [a] separate document [on National Security Doctrine]. But all the elements of the doctrine are well known and have been incorporated from our Constitution downwards ... the absence of a written document, I would respectfully submit, does not create any confusion or any lack of clarity in this matter.⁷

The government rejected the Committee's recommendation to publish a document on the national security doctrine.⁸ However, since then, the government has been much more forthright in conceding to the argument that not having an open and published policy may be a problem.⁹ In fact, preparing the 'long-term strategic defence review' is one of the responsibilities of the NSC.

There was some basis for Tanham's assumption in that in India, unlike in the US and other Western countries, there were no commissions or committees entrusted with the task of formulating strategic policy. The existing institutions, such as the Directorate General of Defence Planning Staff (DPS) in the Defence Ministry, operate in such a confidential manner that their role and utility are not known to the public as well as the security community. Moreover, defence and national security did not get the attention of top political leadership, at least the way critics would have preferred. However, it was not a vacuum and periodically the government would declare in Parliament and outside that the country's security and interests were well taken care of.

Annual reports of the ministries of defence and external affairs, submitted to Parliament, have always contained sections on India's defence and diplomatic position vis-à-vis its neighbours and the world.

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But the criticism was that these assessments were mostly vague¹⁰ and, in any case, they were not taken into consideration while formulating the policy, which was non-existent as far as the public was concerned. K. Subrahmanyam, while endorsing Tanham's viewpoint, explains why it was so:

Foreign policy and national security interest those nations which have either an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy (such as US, China, Russia) or which are highly insecure (such as Pakistan) or which are interested in large scale trade and commerce and an international role for themselves (Germany, Japan, UK and France). India does not have an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy and does not have a paranoid sense of insecurity. Until recently India did not evince much interest in international trade. For these reasons India does not have a foreign and security policy establishment of *adequate size* (emphasis added).¹¹

Two factors deserve attention. One, long-term thinking—if not long-term policy—has been a characteristic of India's approach towards national security. India's nuclearisation, which started in the 1960s and culminated in the Pokhran-II tests in May 1998,¹² and its missile programme, which started in the early 1980s and yielded several delivery systems including the Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) *Agni*, testify to the government's seriousness with regard to security matters. It can as well be argued, at the same time, that the inordinate delay in the execution of nuclear and missile programmes may prove the opposite point. Second, the so-called 'neglect' or 'ad hocism' of the government was due to the fact that national security was not a top priority for the government when compared to other more *pressing* issues like food scarcity, industrialisation, poverty alleviation, etc. The assessment of successive governments appears to be that the national security concerns, whatever they might be, were within manageable limits and existing institutions and resources would be sufficient to meet any contingency. But the debate continued and there was near unanimity that existing arrangements were not enough to ensure national security.

Additionally, India's public espousal of non-alignment, nuclear disarmament, and *panchsheel* (five principles of peaceful coexistence) undoubtedly comes in the way of publicising an open, long-term policy,

which would not appear credible if it were silent on power-projection and long-term threat assessment. Power-projection, commensurate with India's size as well as its elite's aspirations, would have to be grand enough but would be financially unviable. The same is true with long-term threat assessment. These two factors would go against India's self-image and might lead to apprehensions about the country's motives in the entire region—something it could live without. It may be noted that these factors inhibit the government from embracing an open policy but not necessarily from having one, albeit an undeclared one.

On the institutional side, at the time of independence in 1947, India inherited from the British a three-tier system of national security management.¹³ It consisted of the Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC) as the apex body with the Prime Minister as the chairman and its members included ministers of Defence, External Affairs (the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was also holding this portfolio), Finance, and other important Cabinet ministers. The chiefs of the three services (Army, Air Force, and Navy), besides the Defence Secretary, were also members of the DCC. Below that was the Defence Minister's Committee, which included service chiefs and bureaucrats. The third tier of the system was the Chiefs of the Staff Committee (COSC), which, with the abolition of the commander-in-chief's post soon after independence, came to facilitate better coordination among the three services. Added to this system were other specialised bodies like the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) (which was renamed the NSC Secretariat in 1999) and the Joint Planning Committee (JPC).

As such, it was a well thought-out system whereby a clear chain of command and coordination was sought to be accomplished. For example, the DCC provided a forum for the country's top political, bureaucratic, and military leadership to deliberate and determine national security policies. But the problem was that the system was never used in a formal way until the Sino-Indian war in 1962. According to P.V.R. Rao, who was Defence Secretary between 1962 and 1966, prior to the 1962 war, '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 COSC, the JIC, and the JPC 'were either moribund or ineffective And the Defence Committee of the Cabinet was appraised of decisions mostly *post facto*'.¹⁴

Therefore, it is fair to infer that more than anything being wrong with this system, it was the failure of the political leadership to put it to its mandated use that was at the core of the problem. There were

changes made to the so-called Lord Ismay system¹⁵ in the aftermath of 1962 but they did not amount to 'improvements'. In a sense, the position of the armed forces vis-à-vis the government deteriorated. Soon after the 1962 war, the DCC was renamed the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet (ECC) with the Chiefs of Staff losing their membership in the renamed committee and thereafter their access to the Cabinet was severely restricted, a practice that continues even today. The JIC was removed from the purview of the COSC and put under the Cabinet Secretariat. A military defeat of the kind that India suffered at the hands of China could have been the occasion to examine the whole structure of the national security apparatus. But such introspection never took place primarily because the government never admitted that it had ignored or tampered with established institutions and procedures.¹⁶

What baffles one is that successive governments have been accused of a lackadaisical approach towards national security despite the fact that many of the Prime Ministers happen to be well versed in diplomacy and global politics. Many of them kept the Defence or External Affairs portfolio with themselves—the assumption being that these matters deserved their direct involvement and personal attention. A contrary view is that notwithstanding their expertise and interest, being Prime Ministers they could not have devoted the time and attention that these ministries needed. Moreover, the direct involvement of the Prime Minister in the day-to-day functioning of these two key ministries also resulted in the erosion of established institutions and procedures.

Nehru was his own foreign minister and he twice held the defence portfolio (in one occasion for nearly two years). His daughter, Mrs Indira Gandhi, wore the defence cap for two years while she was the Prime Minister and the same was the case with Rajiv Gandhi, V.P. Singh, Chandrasekhar, and P.V. Narasimha Rao. Narasimha Rao, I.K. Gujral, and the present incumbent, Atal Behari Vajpayee, made their mark as foreign ministers before becoming prime ministers. Examined in this context, the charge that the top political leadership does not pay adequate attention to national security appears far-fetched. But the criticism is repeated and sometimes it borders on despondency even among knowledgeable sections. An official panel (the Kargil Review Committee) that examined the incident of Pakistani intrusion into Kashmir in 1999 observed:

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.¹⁷

Hence the need for the NSC. The demands for its creation were the Indian strategic community's remedy to the real or perceived shortcomings in the country's approach towards matters strategic and the lack of an institutional mechanism for long-term planning and effective implementation of security policies.

HISTORY

India's belief that a body similar to the United States' National Security Council may be appropriate for Indian conditions goes back to the early 1960s. Subsequently, a few openly demanded that the US model be adopted¹⁸ while some cautioned against doing so.¹⁹ However, the American experience clearly influenced the Indian thinking. It is more appropriate, on the other hand, to say that the feeling of inadequacy with the existing institutions and the conviction that an NSC would be the solution were shared mainly outside the government. One reason for the government's disinterest appears to be that the NSC evolved in a presidential system (in the US) and, notwithstanding its utility, its integration into India's parliamentary system would be a problematic one. Even the experience of the US with the NSC is not altogether happy.²⁰ If the proponents of the NSC demanded its creation for saving the nation from humiliation like that experienced in the 1962 war, what they ignored was the fact that the NSC in the US presided over many a fiasco including the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam. Even in the 1980s, controversies such as the Iran-Contra arms deal exposed how a few operating from the White House basement (that is where the US NSC is housed) could subvert the system.

After the 1962 war, there were demands for establishing an NSC and even a *pro tempore* arrangement was reportedly made but 'with the passage of time, the NSC went into cold storage and efforts to revive it failed'.²¹ One specific demand, made by P.V.R. Rao, was to have a 'National Security Agency responsible for the collection, analysis and assessment of Intelligence'.²² Rao's conception was less ambitious in that the body he proposed would confine itself to managing intelligence agencies, perhaps much more effectively than in the

case with the JIC. Apart from being modest, this body would be under the sole control of the Prime Minister. Another significant suggestion came from a statutory body, the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) (1966–70). A Study Team on Defence appointed by the ARC recommended in 1970 that a 'National Security Planning Council' and an all-party 'National Defence Council' be appointed.²³

However, the government did not act on the ARC's recommendation as, possibly, defence was kept outside the purview of the Commission.²⁴ This and several similar proposals over the years recognised the pivotal role the Prime Minister occupies in the Indian system and attempted, rightly so, to strengthen his office to address national security issues. Subrahmanyam explained to the ARC's Study Team on Defence that, instead of being a Cabinet committee (that is what happened in 1999), the NSC should replace the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) so that services' chiefs could be brought in. Moreover, he wanted the secretariat of the NSC to be a part of the Prime Minister's secretariat.²⁵

To fulfil its electoral promise, the National Front government headed by V.P. Singh constituted the NSC on 24 August 1990 'to take a holistic view of national security issues in the light of the external, economic, political and military situations and their linkages with our domestic concerns and objectives'.²⁶ Before determining the new body's shape and substance, the government examined the functioning of similar institutions in the US, Britain, the Soviet Union, and others. The Rajiv Gandhi government (1984–89), which preceded Singh's, had apparently carried out some study on the feasibility of an NSC but nothing much is known of the effort. P.R. Chari traces the 'thinking' to create an NSC to 1987.²⁷ Perkovich writes that in 1988 Defence Minister K.C. Pant directed Chari, then an additional secretary in the ministry, to prepare a draft on the contours of an NSC,²⁸ which the latter did. But the proposals did not even go up to the Cabinet level.

In the 1990 set-up, the NSC at the top comprised the Prime Minister (chairman), ministers of Defence, Finance, Home Affairs, and External Affairs. Other central ministers, chief ministers, experts, and specialists could be invited to attend. Below the NSC were a 'Strategic Core Group' of bureaucrats, a 'Secretariat', and a 'National Security Advisory Board'.²⁹

The Council met only once in October 1990 and the Board was never convened. More than any shortcomings of its own, the system was short-lived because the V.P. Singh government was voted out of

Parliament in a vote of no-confidence towards the end of 1990. The P.V. Narasimha Rao Government, which came to power in June 1991, was not convinced of the need for the NSC but, instead of maintaining the same, it merely dragged its feet. The result was that it openly pointed out to the problems with the 1990 set-up and promised an improved version but nothing concrete came of this. For example, Prime Minister Rao told Parliament on 16 May 1995 that the NSC 'was found a little unworkable' and the improved NSC 'is more or less ready, in its final stages and before losing any more time, I would come back to Hon. Members for their views'.³⁰ After this statement, the Rao Government remained in power for another year but nothing came of his promise.

NARASIMHA RAO'S CRITICISM

At least on three occasions, Prime Minister Rao explained to Parliament why the NSC set up in 1990 would be unworkable. His comments were comprehensive and touched upon several aspects of the NSC set-up under Indian conditions; but he never took the next logical step, that is, formulating the structure of an NSC that might be workable in India. On 28 April 1993 he told the Lok Sabha that the NSC might not be successful in accomplishing 'speedy decision making, confidentiality and flexibility'.³¹ The following year he emphasised in the Rajya Sabha that it would not serve any purpose if the NSC was nothing more than the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA)—which it was.³²

On 16 May 1995, Rao disapproved of the NSC lock, stock, and barrel in the Lok Sabha. Though he could not find anything worthwhile in the exercise, he repeated the refrain that he would unveil his version of the NSC. He said that NSC was nothing more than the CCPA 'plus one or two added. It was a kind of mechanical addition. It was not a functional addition'. 'The advisory board [NSAB] ... appears to be somewhat unwieldy ... [making] the whole exercise blurred and confusing'. His fundamental objection to the NSC was that the set-up was more appropriate for the presidential form of government than the parliamentary system³³ followed in India, where the 'business of the Central Government has to be ultimately transacted in the

Cabinet or Cabinet committees' Lastly, he favoured the British model of different Cabinet committees dealing with different aspects of national security.³⁴ T.T. Poulse wrote in May 1998: 'Some of the enterprising defence experts in this country have been appealing to the political parties to go for a National Security Council and they were marketing it as the only panacea for all the security problems of India'.³⁵

THE ORGANISATION OF THE NSC

If one non-Congress Government experimented with the NSC in 1990, yet another non-Congress Government, led by Vajpayee, constituted another NSC with much fanfare in 1999. The aims were noble: To facilitate 'integrated thinking and coordinated application of the political, military, diplomatic, scientific and technological resources' to safeguard national security. However, a cursory look at both the attempts exposes that there was no 'integrated thinking' or a serious effort towards setting up of an NSC. The first attempt may be forgiven because it was a maiden venture. The government should have rectified the shortcomings of the first NSC (especially those pointed out by Prime Minister Rao)³⁶ while creating the second one. It did not do so. What is more, the second NSC was almost a replica of the first one. It can be legitimately asserted that the government merely retrieved the 1990 entity from cold storage, made a few cosmetic changes, and claimed parentage! The only new element in the present set-up is the office of the 'National Security Adviser'. (See Table 4.1)

Of the seven broad subject areas assigned to the new NSC, six were taken *verbatim* from the 1990 *Gazette* notification—a case of not just the poverty of ideas but also drafting skills! (See Table 4.2.) One respected commentator has called for an end to the 'sham'.³⁷ Subrahmanyam, who demanded an NSC as far back as in 1970, is more understanding:

... there will be teething troubles, various infantile ailments and adolescent problems in the development of the NSC and its full effective functioning. *What is worrying and of concern is that it has not even let out its first cry since its birth (emphasis added).*³⁸

Table 4.1
A Comparison of the Organisation of the NSC in 1990 and 1999

1990	1999
National Security Council (Members)	National Security Council (Members)
Prime Minister (Chairman)	Prime Minister (Chairman)
Minister of Defence	Minister of Defence
Minister of External Affairs	Minister of External Affairs
Minister of Finance	Minister of Finance
Minister of Home Affairs	Minister of Home Affairs
(Other central ministers, chief ministers, and other experts can be invited as and when needed)	Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission (Other central ministers and experts can be invited as and when needed)
Strategic Core Group (Members)	Strategic Policy Group (Members)
Cabinet Secretary (Chairman)	Cabinet Secretary (Chairman)
Representatives from the three services and concerned ministries	Defence Secretary
	Finance Secretary
	Home Secretary
	Foreign Secretary
	Governor, Central Bank
	And other key senior officials
Secretariat	Secretariat
Chairman, JIC, was designated as Secretary of the NSC	JIC Secretariat was designated as the NSC Secretariat
National Security Advisory Board	National Security Advisory Board
Members were to be drawn from among chief ministers, members of Parliament, academics, scientists, persons with administrative experience, armed forces, press and media.	Members are to be drawn from experts outside of the government and the number, including its convener, should not exceed 30.
	National Security Adviser

Sources: *The Gazette of India*, Part I, Section I, 22 September 1990, pp. 652-53 and *The Gazette of India*, Part I, Section I, 19 April 1999, pp. 4-8.

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

The NSC at the Cabinet level is just the same in both versions except that the new NSC has the deputy chairman, Planning Commission, as a member. On the debit side, unlike the first NSC, the new body has no representation of the chief ministers. Moreover, it is in no way different from the CCPA,³⁹ something that Prime Minister Rao pointed out way back in 1995. Therefore, the reality is that, when

Table 4.2
A Comparison of the Aims and Objectives of the NSC of 1990 and 1999

1990	1999
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External threat scenario • Strategic defence policies • Other security threats, specially those involving atomic energy, space, and high technology • Internal security covering aspects such as counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, and counter-intelligence • Patterns of alienation likely to emerge within the country, especially those with a social, communal or regional dimension • Security implications of evolving trends in the world economy on India's economic and foreign policies • External economic threats in areas such as energy, commerce, food, and finance • Threats posed by trans-border crimes such as smuggling and traffic in arms, drugs, and narcotics • Evolving a national consensus on strategic and security issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External security environment and threat scenario • None • Security threats involving atomic energy, space, and high technology • Internal security, including counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, and counter-intelligence • Patterns of alienation emerging in the country, especially those with a social, communal or regional dimension • None • Trends in the world economy and economy [<i>sic</i>] security threats in the areas of energy, foreign trade, food, finance, and ecology • Security threats posed by trans-border crimes such as smuggling and traffic in arms, drugs, and narcotics • Coordination in intelligence collection and tasking of intelligence agencies so as to ensure that intelligence is focused on areas of concern for the nation

Sources: *The Gazette of India*, Part I, Section I, 22 September 1990, pp. 652-53 and *The Gazette of India*, Part I, Section I, 19 April 1999, pp. 4-8.

deliberating national security matters, the CCPA becomes the NSC! (Sometimes it is also known as the Cabinet Committee on Security.)

STRATEGIC POLICY GROUP

Intended as a forum of top bureaucrats (the body was called 'Strategic Core Group' in 1990), the new Group is fairly comprehensive and

consists of 17 top officials including the Cabinet Secretary (chairman), the three service chiefs, and the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. The Group is similar to the Council in that most of its members, if not all, regularly meet under the rubric of one committee or the other. It is expected to function as the 'principal mechanism for inter-ministerial coordination and integration of relevant inputs'. It is also supposed to undertake the 'long-term strategic defence review'. Chari said in the context of the nuclear doctrine:

The Strategic Policy Group comprised serving officials; they were included on the basis of their appointments, not any special expertise in strategic issues. These busy persons had neither the time nor the inclination to delve into intricate security issues, and were hardly likely to be concerned with the intricacies of a nuclear doctrine.⁴⁰

SECRETARIAT

The JIC has been converted into the NSC Secretariat. This, too, is not necessarily an innovation as the chairman of the JIC was designated (around 1995) as the secretary of the NSC. The trouble is, as Subrahmanyam highlighted in a lecture, that the JIC continues to discharge its earlier functions as an intelligence assessing body and works as the NSC Secretariat, servicing the NSAB and the Strategic Policy Group and also handles other tasks assigned to it by the government.⁴¹ Subrahmanyam observed, 'it is quite obvious that adequate thought has not been given to developing an appropriate staff for the National Security Council to function effectively. It is, therefore, not surprising that the council has not been functional'.⁴² Unlike the JIC, which was under the Cabinet Secretariat, the NSC Secretariat is now integrated into the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).⁴³

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISORY BOARD

Purely advisory in nature, the NSAB is the only body in the NSC set-up that is outside the government. The principle behind the concept is praiseworthy. One accomplishment of the Board is that it prepared

and released a draft nuclear doctrine in August 1999 to promote a national debate. A debate did follow, understandably on partisan lines. It was suggested that the NSAB merely took the cue from a speech made by the Prime Minister in December 1998 and wove 'its' doctrine around it.⁴⁴

It is imperative that a formal channel be found to provide the government with independent and varied viewpoints on national security. Additionally, the NSAB could be a way of co-opting independent experts into the system.

But the basic criticism of Prime Minister Rao against the NSAB of 1990 is equally valid on the NSAB formulated in 1999: both are too large and unwieldy. Moreover, what was intended to be a meeting of the best brains on strategic affairs became a clash of egos.⁴⁵ During the first three years of its existence, the NSAB was reconstituted thrice. Its ever-changing size and shape indicates the lack of clearly defined purpose for the entire exercise.

It is doubtful how far the Board's inputs are useful in view of its lack of access to classified information.⁴⁶ Originality and the independence to provide advice that is not in tune with the government's views may not be virtues. But it raises questions about the utility of a non-official advisory board. The domination of ex-bureaucrats—who are responsible for much of the mess—is unlikely to enhance the standing of the Board.

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER

The office of the National Security Advisor is the only difference between the 1990 and 1999 versions. More than the American model, a misinterpretation of that model seems to have influenced the creation of a National Security Adviser (NSA). The United States National Security Act of 1947, which created the US NSC, did not have any provision for an NSA. It was only in 1953 that the Eisenhower Administration created the post of an 'Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs' but the popular title even now remains National Security Adviser!⁴⁷ Media and academic writings mostly refer to the person heading the NSC by the informal tag of 'adviser'. He was originally intended to be a staff coordinator. But the misinterpretation

matters, and if even knowledgeable people prefer 'adviser' to 'assistant', it is because that is just what the office has become.

The Indian adviser, on the contrary, appears to be an assistant.⁴⁸ At the moment, the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister also acts as the NSA. However, it is not clear whether it is a permanent arrangement. There has been a lot of criticism about the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary officiating as the NSA mostly on the grounds that both require full-time incumbents. The Kargil Review Committee opined that 'there must be a full time' NSA.⁴⁹ That the Principal Secretary might not be able to give adequate attention to his 'other half' may be partly valid. On the other hand, if the posts are separated, there is likely to be a clash between the two functionaries.

ASSESSMENT

Thus, the NSC as it exists today in India is essentially a façade. Its utility and effectiveness are questionable. On the contrary, a strong, formal NSC is bound to encroach upon established institutions. It is possible, therefore, that the government might not have been disingenuous in creating an all ex officio, staff organisation, except for the NSAB; it was just that it did not want to unsettle the system by doing anything more. That explains also why the government established the NSC as a non-statutory body.

That still keeps alive two problems that the NSC is supposed to solve. First, the need to introduce long-term national security planning and, second, providing an effective institutional mechanism for that purpose. However, these problems can be solved by strengthening existing institutions, not by creating a new but ineffective body. For example, ever since the demise of the DCC soon after the 1962 war, the Chiefs of Staff have not been members of any Cabinet committee.

Ironically, the military establishment had hoped that the creation of an NSC would facilitate a greater role for it in defence planning and policy implementation.⁵⁰ In the NSC, the Chiefs of Staff are members at the bureaucratic level and the armed forces are represented by the Defence Minister at the apex level. A related issue, very often raised by a few serving and many retired personnel of the services, is the

need not to carry the principle of civilian control over the military to unreasonable lengths. Civilian supremacy is not only a laudable objective but the cornerstone of civil-military relations in any modern state. But the armed forces resent that the ideal of civilian supremacy has degenerated into civil servants' supremacy.

Ultimately, just like in any developing country, India's security policy continues to be determined by the country's economy—by implication the finance ministry. One inexplicable and recurrent theme here is that though the defence ministry carries out prior consultations with the finance ministry while preparing five-year plans for defence, the latter always substantially cuts the allocation at a later date. That not only leaves room for complaints from the services but gives the impression that 'adequate' funding is not provided for national security. Two problems need attention. First, due to secrecy over defence policy formulation—not much is revealed even to Parliament—it is impossible to ascertain how far the services' threat assessments and consequent demands for resources are 'reasonable'. Unless the public and Parliament are provided with sufficient information, there cannot be any improvement. Second, the defence and finance ministries should have closer coordination to determine sufficiency of funds for national security. A five-year defence plan is not finalised even in its fifth year!

The NSC is unlikely to solve these and myriad other problems. On the other hand, any attempts to strengthen the NSC are bound to create more complications like bureaucratic turf-wars between the NSC and other branches of the government.⁵¹ What can one do with this informal way of functioning, which relegates policy making as an institutional function to a secondary status and gives primacy to personalities? However, there is one area in which the Indian strategic community can help itself. It should not overload the national security bogey with everything that has 'security' as a suffix. Economic security, environmental security, social security, etc., are worthy goals, which can be achieved by traditional departments; there is no need to bring them under the ambit of national security. National security *per se* remains primarily a military subject and keeping that distinction in mind will accord some clarity so essential for security planning and its execution.

In a way, the strategic community's demand for an NSC that is all-encompassing 'integrated thinking', is self-defeating. This is because any new institution that is aimed at dealing with several key aspects

of governance can only be realised as part of a major overhaul of the entire system—something not in sight in India. Moreover, at present, PMO and the Cabinet Secretariat more or less discharge the functions of coordination. Specifically, the PMO has come to assume the functions of, among others, the NSC.

CONCLUSION

The demand for a body devoted to national security planning began after India's military debacle in 1962. Thereafter, India's strategic community vociferously championed its cause and the formation of the NSC in 1999 was the logical culmination of the prolonged demand. The chain of command within the organisational set-up of the NSC, namely, the Council at the Cabinet level, the Strategic Core Group of bureaucrats, the NSA, and the NSAB, is not clearly defined thereby raising doubts about the efficacy of the exercise. That not much consideration was given to the institutional integrity while creating the NSC has become evident in the way the PMO and, specifically, the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister (who is also the NSA) have come to acquire power at the cost of other established institutions. An effective NSC would demand a clear division of responsibilities among various institutions of the government, and clarity in the civil-military and military-bureaucratic relationship.

NOTES

1. Fairly extensive literature is available on the government's omissions and commissions leading to the Sino-Indian war and on related issues after independence in general. For example, see Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (London: University of California Press, 1971); J.P. Dalvi, *The Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962* (Bombay: Thacker & Company Limited, 1969); B.M. Kaul, *The Untold Story* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1967); K. Subrahmanyam, *Perspectives in Defence Planning* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1972); Chris Smith, *India's Ad Hoc Arsenal: Direction or Drift in Defence Policy?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1994); and Raju G.C. Thomas, *Indian Security Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

2. The system of standing committees was in existence during the British rule but it was abolished in 1952, Raju G.C., Thomas, *Indian Security Policy*, p. 95.
3. V.R. Raghavan, *India's Need for Strategic Balance: Security in the Post-Cold War World* (New Delhi: Delhi Policy Group, 1996), pp. 46–47.
4. For the text of the notification that announced the NSC set-up, see *The Gazette of India*, Part I, Section I, 19 April 1999, pp. 4–8. However, the decision was announced in December 1998, George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 451.
5. Ross H. Munro, 'Superpower Rising: Propelled by an Arms Buildup, India Asserts its Place on the World Stage', *Time* (New York), Vol. 133, No. 14, 3 April 1989, pp. 6–13. Incidentally, this article appeared as the cover story 'Super India' of the magazine's issue in India and was widely commented upon in the Indian media. However, the magazine's international edition of the same issue carried an abridged version of Munro's article without any reference to 'Super India'!
6. George K. Tanham, 'Indian Strategic Culture', *The Washington Quarterly* (Washington), Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 1992. Also see Ravinder Pal Singh, 'India', in Ravinder Pal Singh (ed.), *Arms Procurement Decision Making, Volume I: China, India, Israel, Japan, South Korea and Thailand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1998), p. 67.
7. *Standing Committee on Defence (1995–96)* (Tenth Lok Sabha, Sixth Report), 'Defence Policy, Planning and Management' (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, March, 1996), p. 4.
8. *Standing Committee on Defence (1996–97)* (Eleventh Lok Sabha, Second Report), 'Action Taken on the Recommendations Contained in the Sixth Report of the Committee (Tenth Lok Sabha) on the subject "Defence Policy, Planning and Management"' (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, December 1996), p. 4.
9. In May 2001, the *Report of the Group of Ministers on National Security* made it official: 'The defence planning process is greatly handicapped by the absence of a national security doctrine, and commitment of funds beyond the financial year', see *Report of the Group of Ministers on National Security* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2001), p. 98.
10. For example, a recent annual report of the Defence Ministry has accomplished—within a space of 10 pages—a discussion of national security objectives, salient features of India's security environment, India's relations with 13 important countries in addition to reviewing developments in several regions, and also maritime security of India, see *Annual Report 2000–2001*, Ministry of Defence (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, 2001), pp. 2–11.
11. See K. Subrahmanyam's 'Introduction' to Jaswant Singh, *Defending India* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. xix–xx.
12. For details of how successive prime ministers paid close attention to the weapons' programme, see, George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*.
13. Raju G.C. Thomas, *Indian Security Policy*, pp. 119–20. Also see A.L. Venkateswaran, *Defence Organization in India* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1967), pp. 89–90.
14. P.V.R. Rao, *Defence Without Drift* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1970), pp. 307–9.
15. *Ibid.* (The chief architect of this set-up is Lord Ismay who was the Secretary to the Defence Committee of the [British] Cabinet.)

16. For example, Nehru told Parliament in September 1963, 'China has betrayed us; the world has betrayed us'. See V.A. Pai Panandiker and Ajay K. Mehra, *The Indian Cabinet: A Study in Governance* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996), p. 179.
17. *Kargil Review Committee Report* submitted by a panel headed by K. Subrahmanyam, (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, 1999), p. 221. Also see Ravinder Pal Singh, 'India', p. 67.
18. See, for example, P.M. Kamat, 'Foreign Policymaking in India: Need for Committee System to Strengthen the Role of Parliament', *Strategic Analysis* (New Delhi), Vol. 12, No. 2, May 1987, p. 232.
19. T.T. Poulouse, 'Where the NSC Failed', *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 22 May 1998. Subrahmanyam wrote, 'The Indian NSC cannot be on the US model' because of the differences in political systems in the two countries as well as their foreign policy objectives, see his 'Introduction', p. xxiii.
20. See John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991) and Karl F. Inderfurth and Loch K. Johnson, *Decisions of the Highest Order: Perspectives on the National Security Council* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1988).
21. J.K. Dutt, 'Resurrecting the NSC', *The Statesman* (New Delhi), 13 January 1998.
22. P.V.R. Rao, *Defence Without Drift*, pp. 316-17.
23. A.G. Noorani, 'JPC On CNS-III: Accountability To Parliament Needed', *The Statesman*, 13 April 1999.
24. The Home Ministry Resolution, appointing the ARC, excluded defence, railways, external affairs, security and intelligence work from detailed examination of the Commission. But, it said, the ARC was 'free to take the problems of these sectors into account in recommending reorganization of the machinery of the Government ...'. See *The Administrative Reforms Commission and its Work: A Brief Survey* (New Delhi, 1970), pp. 47-49.
25. K. Subrahmanyam, *Perspectives in Defence Planning*, pp. 129-30. In March 2002, three decades after Subrahmanyam made the suggestion, the NSC's Secretariat was attached to the PMO and the head of the Secretariat was to act as the deputy to the National Security Adviser, see *The Hindu*, 11 March 2002.
26. For the text of the Cabinet Secretariat Resolution, see *The Gazette of India*, Part I, Section I, 22 September 1990, pp. 652-53.
27. P.R. Chari, 'India's Nuclear Doctrine: Confused Ambitions', *The Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Fall-Winter 2000, p. 124.
28. Interestingly, the move was confronted with 'institutional and personal resistance'. The then army chief, Gen. V.N. Sharma was quoted as saying: '[A]ll decisions on defining the threat faced by my service will be made by me, not a national security council, and I will not abdicate my responsibility for decision making in this regard', see George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, p. 297.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Lok Sabha Debates*, Thirteenth Session, Tenth Lok Sabha, 16 May 1995 (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat), cols 290-304 and also see Sandy Gordon, *India's Rise to Power in the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 130-31.

31. See, *Lok Sabha Debates*, Sixth Session, Tenth Lok Sabha, 28 April 1993 (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat), cols 698–99.
32. See, *Rajya Sabha Debates*, 3 May 1994, (New Delhi: Rajya Sabha Secretariat), cols 254–55.
33. An unnamed leader of the present ruling party, the BJP, expressed the same view, see George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, p. 372.
34. *Lok Sabha Debates*, Thirteenth Session, Tenth Lok Sabha, 16 May 1995.
35. T.T. Poulse, 'Where the NSC Failed'.
36. *Lok Sabha Debates*, Thirteenth Session, Tenth Lok Sabha, 16 May 1995.
37. A.G. Noorani, 'End This Sham: National Security Council', *The Statesman* (New Delhi), 16 June 1999.
38. K. Subrahmanyam, 'Wanted Long-Term Defence Planning: Elite Indifferent to National Security', *The Tribune* (Chandigarh), 5 November 2000.
39. The CCPA has had its origins in the 1950s' Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC).
40. P.R. Chari, 'India's Nuclear Doctrine', p. 125.
41. K. Subrahmanyam, 'Wanted Long-Term Defence Planning'.
42. Ibid.
43. *The Hindu*, 11 March 2002.
44. P.R. Chari, 'India's Nuclear Doctrine', p. 131.
45. See, for example, Janaki Bahadur Kremmer, 'In the Tower of Babel: The NSC's Advisory Board is a Battleground of Diametrically Divergent Views and Inflated Egos', *Outlook* (New Delhi), Vol. 5, No. 3, 1 February 1999, pp. 45–46.
46. Some NSAB members said that 'because classified information will not be easily available to them, they will never be able to give tactical advice and will instead be restricted to recommendations on long-term goals'. See *ibid.*, p. 46.
47. I.M. Destler, 'A Job That Doesn't Work', in Karl F. Inderfurth and Loch K. Johnson, *Decisions of the Highest Order*, pp. 320–24.
48. He 'shall function as the channel for servicing the National Security Council', see *The Gazette of India*, Part I, Section I, 19 April 1999, p. 5.
49. *Kargil Review Committee Report*, p. 215.
50. George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, p. 413.
51. In fact, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of External Affairs were reportedly opposed to the revival of the NSC as they were not convinced of its utility and were also apprehensive that the new body might usurp their powers. See Ravinder Pal Singh, *Arms Procurement Decision Making*, p. 68 (footnote 78).