



## Forging India's Hard Power in the New Century

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### **Summary**

Geography, geo-politics, technology, economy and culture mostly shape a state's preferences in terms of hard power to serve its national security interests and objectives. States often pursue multiple security objectives - some more imagined than real - and herein lies a strategic dilemma. For a country like India, which seeks to carve an independent path, the rise to great power status will require capable, ready and relevant instruments of military force. Accordingly, this paper examines the problem of fashioning India's hard power at four important levels: first, it identifies those key strategic and economic opportunities that are currently driving India's military rise; second, those critical security challenges and threats that the country might have to face in the immediate and foreseeable future; third, the organisational hurdles and inhibitions that limit the national capacity to tackle these myriad security challenges; and finally, the organisational changes that are necessary in the medium to long term to build military efficacy and efficiency.

## Introduction

Geography, geo-politics, technology, economy and culture shape a state's preferences in terms of hard power to serve its national security interests and objectives. States often tend to pursue multiple national security objectives - some more imagined than real. For a country like India, which seeks to carve an independent path, the rise to great power status will require capable and usable instruments of force to support its security needs, both continental and maritime. The modern era demands that a nation's ability to create and field a viable military force comprising land, air and sea based components will have to be integrated with other measures of state power such as economic prowess, social cohesion, and political stability. How India fashions its hard power in the twenty first century will depend to a large extent on its ability to address several contradictory factors.

This issue brief examines the problem of fashioning India's hard power at four fundamental levels: first, the key strategic and economic opportunities that are currently driving India's military rise; second, the critical security challenges and threats that the country might have to face in the immediate and foreseeable future; third, the organisational hurdles that limit the nation's capacity to tackle these myriad security challenges and threats; and finally, the organisational changes that are necessary in the medium to long term to build India's military efficacy and efficiency. The brief argues that India's capacity to shape the creation and use of instruments of force is still not certain at this juncture, and its success will depend on how the country's political and military leadership manages to reconcile the tensions between the strategic opportunities, threats and challenges.

## Strategic Opportunities

The key strategic and economic drivers that currently contribute to India's rise as a regional power, and consequently, its rise as a military power of some significance, are essentially three fold. These are India's high rate of economic growth; its national aspirations and vision; and the evolving strategic partnerships at the global and regional levels.

## Economic Growth

A military equipped with modern defence systems that are sophisticated and effective in any given operational environment is so prohibitively expensive that it can simply boggle the defence policy makers' and practitioners' imagination and expertise. For a country like India, which has to deal not simply with the questions of territorial defence and internal security but also with sound and equitable socio-economic development and growth, maintaining robust economic growth is essential. A vibrant economy alone can buy increased levels of military capability and readiness, and thereby ensure military effectiveness in times of crises. More importantly, it is essential to acquire the technological sophistication and capability edge required to deliver quick and decisive military outcomes in the future. Good tools of the trade and men who use these tools are expensive. It will

be simply impossible to acquire such capabilities without a sustained and consistent economic growth of at least 8 to 10 per cent a year. Economic growth and access to high defence technology – whether imported or indigenous - appear to be changing these perspectives within the country. India's military expenditure on procurement of capital items is expected to grow from US \$13.1 billion in 2010-2011 to \$ 19.2 billion by 2014-15 (even when the allocation would have fallen to 1.76 per cent in FY 2014-15, as per the Thirteenth Finance Committee report).

However, a few experts argue, and quite correctly, that India's technocratic approach towards transforming its military capabilities can be misleading since this might not be according adequate attention to organisational reform and culture. The issue is that the military's relevance and readiness are not dependent on technology alone, but on the creation of efficient organisational structures and practices that can genuinely meet the foreseeable and unforeseeable challenges of the future. A modest three per cent allocation of the GDP to the defence sector should be adequate for the necessary modernisation of India's armed forces. At yet another level, the effective and optimal utilisation of the allocated resources will be equally essential to acquire the desired military capabilities.

### **National Vision**

India's ability to fashion its hard power in the future will much depend on the country's national vision and the quality of strategic decision making across several departments and disciplines. National vision and strategic thinking will be essential to manage the pursuit of great power status. The national interests that India seeks to advance will form the basis of its future defence planning and force structuring. The critical issue here is whether India can develop the political institutions that allow it to define its military goals clearly and, in turn, allow it to mobilise its resources for economic growth effectively. This national vision alone can allow the Indian state to transform its strategic resources in terms of money, manpower and material (3Ms) efficiently into some useable instruments of force required to make it a great power. Currently, there exists an acute deficit on this account which, in turn, inhibits the maintenance of the right balance between development and defence in the most creative ways possible. Greater clarity on the country's grand strategy, and in turn, the national security strategy alone can secure India's unhindered economic and technological growth.

### **Strategic Partnerships**

India's preference for a multipolar global order might not be a practical proposition in the future, as the international system might continue to remain unipolar for at least the next few decades or so. Consequently, the challenge for India will be to develop a viable strategic partnership with important countries that serve both mutual interests and balance or counter the inimical forces in the neighbourhood. The United States, Russia, Japan and the EU will form important components of these strategic partnerships. At the same time,

countries of West, South East and Central Asia will also assume importance. India will have to figure out which of these strategic relationships could be best leveraged to enhance its soft and hard power. All of them may need to be part of India's strategic relationship, and one need not come at the cost of the others when pursued simultaneously. China too will have to figure prominently in this relationship. But what might be the shape and drift of the India-China relationship will be difficult to envisage given the long standing political and diplomatic irritants between the two countries. However, by doing so, India will acquire both the political and diplomatic flexibility to manoeuvre within the emerging international system with relative ease. And from a purely military perspective, it will be in India's interest to develop productive and collaborative defence relationships with a range of countries globally. Viable strategic partnerships can not only open up important avenues for acquisition of military technologies in the future, but also enable the adoption of military best practices and procedures from these partners.

### **Key Threats: Immediate and Foreseeable**

India occupies a predominant geo-strategic position in South Asia and in the Indian Ocean region. Some analysts argue that though India's location makes eminent geostrategic sense, its natural boundaries are nevertheless quite weak and susceptible to penetration. The country shares land borders with six countries and it is prone to external and internal threats. The external security threats essentially emanate from China and Pakistan, while the internal threats involve cross-border terrorism, non-state and trans-national actors, illegal migration, drug trafficking and organized crime. Clearly, the critical security challenges that drive India's fashioning of hard power involves effective border management, addressing internal and external security concerns as well as maritime security.

### **Border Security**

The long and porous land borders present a significant security challenge to the Indian state. The employment of multiple agencies including the Indian Army, the Border Security Force (BSF), the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Assam Rifles (AR) along these extensive land borders compound the security problem. Issues of uneven operational efficacy and organisational control are a serious concern. Furthermore, the inept management of the borders over time has led to volatile internal security situations. Experience indicates that gaps in border security has exacerbated existing insurgencies in the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Nagaland in the past. Also, the porous, and on occasion unguarded borders with countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal have created additional security problems like illegal migration, the entry of political asylum seekers, and the unobtrusive movement of terrorist groups. A particularly sensitive issue is the existence of Indian enclaves within Bangladesh, and vice versa. Similarly, sporadic Chinese incursions continue despite the many confidence-building measures undertaken in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, and in eastern Ladakh. In the west,

infiltration by Pakistan-abetted terrorist groups and border violations remain an important security issue. In this context, insulating the country's frontiers against infiltration, incursions, and intrusions and particularly reversing the demographic inversion translates into a major border management challenge.

### **Internal Security**

India has to address the challenge of internal security without undermining its capacity for external defence. Historically, it has dealt with this challenge by employing manpower-intensive operations instead of technology. Consequently, its approach to preserving internal security has not been as effective as it might be, because the use of technology to supplement counter-insurgent operations has been grossly lacking. Not surprisingly, the internal security situation in several parts of the country remains a significant issue. In recent times, the menace of left wing extremism has been characterised as the single biggest challenge to India's internal security. For instance, Naxalite activity is now noticed in more than 150 districts across the country as against the 133 districts that were reported to have been active just one year earlier. The number of violence prone districts too has risen from 67 to 85 in the same period. At yet another level, though the scourge of Pakistan sponsored militancy in Kashmir has substantially reduced compared to previous years, the growing instances of public unrest and disaffection in the Kashmir Valley is a cause of concern. Maintaining large counter-insurgency forces cuts India's ability to acquire those capabilities that modern military conflicts demand. Here, India might have to make painful yet careful choices of investing either in conventional and sub-conventional military force levels because of the gravity of internal security commitments.

### **External Security**

An important security challenge is the need to protect the country from external military threats in a nuclear environment. These threats could take several forms ranging from a minor border violation to an incursion or intrusion to limited offensive actions either confined to a single operational theatre or more. Does India have the capacity to prosecute wars of swift and short duration successfully? The issue is further complicated by the presence of nuclear weapon states in the neighbourhood. While an all out war might not be likely given the huge cost and dangers involved, the obsolescence of war, and particularly a limited one, is also not assured. So how to manage and prosecute a war is a challenge that India faces especially with respect to Pakistan. This will require capabilities to deter, or if deterrence fails, to punish the adversary but without contributing to escalation. It is in this context of being able to successfully prosecute a limited war that the possibility of conflict escalation - deliberate or inadvertent - becomes a serious matter of foreign and defence policy. The military's readiness to deal with external threats demand a doctrinal approach that puts a premium on achieving a favourable outcome on the battlefield before the international community intervenes or the conflict spirals into unavoidable nuclear escalation. Getting the Indian military to successfully prosecute a

fast paced war will require extremely nuanced investments in new military technologies, doctrines and concepts. Acquiring these capabilities will be costly and above all will require political clarity to fashion capabilities that are flexible, precise, quick and lethal.

Another aspect affecting the country's external security pertains to whether India can acquire an effective nuclear deterrent. Nuclear weapons are important in India's security calculus, particularly in the context of China and Pakistan. India's scientific capacity, and the doctrinal stance including minimum deterrence, no first use, and strict civilian control over the nuclear arsenal, provides the foundation to develop a nuclear deterrent without embarking upon an arms race. However, to ensure this outcome, the country's strategic community comprising the national security policy makers, strategists and practitioners will have to be the real drivers of doctrine and new capabilities. To this end, it is imperative to have a clear understanding of the Chinese and Pakistani nuclear doctrines and their nuclear arsenals as well.

At yet another level, adversaries will seek to harness the military potential of emerging technologies such as nanotechnology, biotechnology, and information technology, thereby adding to India's security concerns. The adverse impact of such disruptive technological capabilities in the possession of trans-national and non-state actors is also a cause for anxiety.

### **Maritime Security**

The Indian Ocean Region is also critical to the country's security in terms of its trade, energy needs, protection of its island territories and exploitation of the EEZ. A substantial part of India's economic activity is located within the EEZ along the 7,516 km-long coastline. India's EEZ is 2,013,410 square kilometres, which is equal to 66 per cent of the land mass, and to which another 530,000 square kilometres is likely to be added as an extension to the continental shelf. This strategically significant oceanic region characterised by narrow navigational channels to its east and west can be interdicted or disrupted by inimical powers in the future. The primary choke points are the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, Cape of Good Hope, Mozambique Channel, Six-degree channel, Straits of Malacca and Singapore, Sunda Strait, and the Lombok Strait. Similarly, India's maritime neighbourhood is also critical for the smooth flow of oil, raw materials and trade for several countries. The need to evolve comprehensive and combined security measures to protect India's exclusive economic zone, its island territories and deep sea mining zones, and the littorals will assume greater significance. The Indian Navy can be expected to play an important role in securing and supporting India's maritime objectives, missions and tasks in the foreseeable future.

### **Regional Security**

If India aspires to become a regional power of some significance, it has to become a net provider of security in the sub-continental context, and even beyond. This might include

incidents or situations ranging from natural disasters, threats to legitimate governments in power or civil strife, illegal migration, organised crime, and trans-national terrorism. At another level, this might include illegal occupation of island territories, blockade of sea routes or channels, or illegal exploitation of the exclusive economic zone. Any Indian attempt to provide regional security will be fraught with the risk of regional rivalries, and might even raise suspicions among India's neighbours. If one shifts the focus beyond the sub-continent, say to other parts of Asia, there will be other inter-state rivalries and dilemmas that will impinge on the provision of regional security. So how does the Indian state envision its regional security requirements that include peacekeeping, peace making, and post conflict stability operations? How does it acquire the military capabilities that are required even to meet the most minimal set of operational contingencies? Surely, it will require India to make expensive choices with respect to issues of interoperability, and increased endurance and outreach. Finally, the three Services will have to develop joint operating structures and practices to maintain and operate these capabilities.

## **Hurdles and Limitations**

India faces multiple hurdles and limitations which can be seen at six levels: policy, planning, doctrinal evolution, capability development, civil-military relations and professional military education.

### **Policy**

India has no formal document that systematically articulates the country's national security objectives, strategy and policy. Successive governments, the parliamentary standing committee on defence, and the strategic community have acknowledged this lack of a national security strategy. The National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) too has emphasised upon the need for a coherent document on India's national security concerns, objectives and strategy, which will constitute the basis of the nation's defence policy and military objectives, and long term military capability development plans (LTIPP). The absence of an overarching strategic guidance handicaps defence policy makers, planners and practitioners at the operational and tactical levels, thus leading to military choices which at times may not find favour with the highest decision making body. Several defence analysts and military experts in the country have therefore argued that a strategic defence review is most essential.

### **Planning**

Considering that the key to operational success lies in the theatre based integration of the three military services, it is essential to have a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) to provide single-point military advice. It is also necessary to clearly identify the commonalities in the operational and logistical footprints of the three services namely the army, navy and air force, with a view to evolve mutually shared and cost-effective joint operating protocols and practices for the future. At yet another level, there might be a need to re-evaluate the

military's teeth to tail ratio (T3R), and consequently maintain a cost effective, efficient and lethal war fighting machine. Inter-service integration and right sizing of the three services alone can help forge the cutting edge military capabilities that are needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Above all, there will be a need to integrate the military within the national security and decision making apparatus; otherwise the mistrust between the two will continue to accentuate.

Doctrinal Evolution I doctrine in 1995. The Indian Army introduced its new war fighting doctrine in 2004, which was followed by the doctrine on sub-conventional warfare in 2006. Later in the same year, the Indian Navy released its first version of the maritime doctrine which set out a new road map for a blue water role. However, the principal issue here is that these military doctrines were developed as stand alone doctrines, and at different points in time. The organisational motivations to formulate them were also different, and hence the need to harmonise them. The key need, therefore, is to coordinate these doctrines among the three services in conformity with the military challenges and threats of the future.

Six inter-linked doctrinal or strategy related issues spanning both conventional and sub-conventional threat scenarios, and non-traditional challenges, assume importance here.

- = First, there is a need to evolve a pan-Indian border security framework, and a 24x7 management strategy, to guard the country's frontiers from infiltration, intrusions and incursions, and demographic inversion, deliberate or otherwise from the neighbouring countries. New technology and inter-agency coordination alone can form the basis of an effective border management strategy.
- = Second, it is necessary to evolve a multi-agency internal security framework, and an appropriate counter-terrorism strategy, to deal with the myriad internal security threats. This should be a scalable strategy wherein the employment of the Indian armed forces is the last resort. Till such time that the paramilitary organisations are fully geared to deal with such internal security threats, the difficult internal security situations especially along the border areas might continue to be handled by the armed forces. Intelligence, sound counter-terrorism drills and inter-agency cooperation must form the basis of the country's counter-terrorism strategy.
- = Third, there is a need to maintain sufficient conventional war fighting deterrent in terms of capabilities on land, air and sea to deter or dissuade adversaries from indulging in any military misadventure. Increasingly, this capability will have to carry a seaward bias wherein an extremely capable and tri-service maritime force is able to secure the country's trade and commerce interests in the Indian Ocean region, and even beyond. High-technology weapon platforms, organisational cohesion and speed in delivery of combat power will form the basis of India's conventional war fighting strategy in the future.

- = Fourth, a multi-agency approach comprising elements of the foreign office, the defence establishment and civil affairs departments might even be necessary to deliver regional security in the future. Given India's territorial size, economic and military might, and geographical location, it might be normal for several countries in the region to expect assistance from New Delhi in times of crises. Varying contingencies might demand different kinds of responses - civilian, paramilitary, or military. However, the common denominator in each of these cases will be the immediacy of assistance that may be required. India's military will therefore have to build different categories of land, sea and air based capabilities to successfully render assistance. While India's response to natural disasters and other catastrophes will be readily accepted, politico-military interventions might be sensitive and therefore become contentious. Surely, the discretion here will be exercised by the national leadership and the highest decision taking body.
- = Fifth, a secure, survivable and tri-service second strike nuclear capability will be essential to back up India's conventional military capabilities. This will involve a viable nuclear doctrine and an efficacious arsenal. In the absence of adequate confidence levels at the operational level, the resulting nuclear doctrine and strategy might be unable to communicate a credible deterrent effect to the adversaries.
- = Sixth, it is necessary to evolve a strategy to deal with emerging disruptive threats such as biological, cyber, space and electronic warfare. Developing strategic responses to such emerging threats will be a principal doctrinal need in times to come.

### **Capability Development**

Currently, there are structural and systemic limits to developing appropriate defence capabilities in the country. Indian military's capability development is driven by large-scale defence imports and substitutes especially in the category of hi-tech weapon platforms and systems. At yet another level, the temptation to develop everything indigenously from assault rifles to main battle tanks to advanced combat systems have yielded few successes. The stasis in the process of military technology indigenisation can only be remedied by creating better facilities for research, development, production, increased public-private partnerships and systemic corrections in the defence acquisition processes. Even if these reforms are successfully implemented, there is one reality that simply cannot be ignored. It is that the demand for advanced war fighting equipment by the Indian armed forces will continue to be relatively small, and the resulting economies of scale might not warrant developing end-to-end technical knowledge to produce expensive and complex weapon systems. A middle ground will have to be found over time. In the context of procurement processes, there is an urgent need to graduate beyond the first generation defence acquisition reforms centred around excessive "procedure-isation" of the procurement process and move towards the timely "delivery" of capability needs. Learning

from Western experiences such as those outlined in the recent Bernard Gray report in the United Kingdom, and recommendations of the US House of Representatives' House Armed Services Committee (HASC) on issues of military readiness might be helpful.

### **Civil-Military Relations**

Civil-military relations are at the core of any national security framework and the decision-making process. While explicit political control over the military cannot be questioned, the need to involve the Indian armed forces as equal and responsible partners in the decision-making process is important. Cross-pollination of national security bodies with defence expertise could contribute to better understanding on matters military and, consequently, the strategic thinking within the country. In the short-to-medium term, it will entail the functional integration of the MoD and service headquarters, the creation of a chief of defence staff (CDS), representation of military staff in national security structures such as the NSC, leveraging military diplomacy in pursuit of India's foreign policy objectives, consistency in military resourcing and expenditure, procedural reforms in the acquisition process and defence industry, and ensuring adequate operational preparedness levels to meet a range of military challenges and non-traditional threats.

### **Military Education**

Military leaders must think critically, communicate well, and demonstrate professional acumen whilst leading the rank and file in dangerous and difficult situations. Militaries therefore cannot be complacent when it comes to producing combat leaders capable of meeting the challenges of command at the tactical, operational and strategic levels. This has arguably suffered in recent years and there is a need for greater learning through a professional military education system. Greater reliance on technology and innovation will imply a corresponding shift in organisational culture, training and education. Exposure to strategic and military studies both at home and abroad could provide the much-needed impetus for the development of doctrinal thought and military strategies as well as the technological inclination. As a matter of national security interest, it is therefore expedient to invest in professional military education (PME) in order to train and develop officers capable of dealing with complex politico-military and operational contingencies of the future. An institution such as the Indian National Defence University (INDU) designed to train the military leadership on a wide range of national security issues will have immense long term strategic value. Frequent military exchanges and overseas deployment too could contribute towards the development of new organisational thought and practices.

### **Necessary Changes**

The changing security environment calls for re-fashioning the use of hard power, which may have to be managed differently in the future. A few issues that merit attention are discussed below.

- = First, understands the changing role of the military when there are increasing limits on the use of military force, and the complexity of the relationship between diplomacy, external defence and internal security. Militaries will increasingly be encumbered with non-traditional threats and foreign policy related responsibilities, and there is a greater need to quasi-militarize the diplomatic machinery. As civilian resources would never be enough to pursue pressing national interests and concerns, a measured devolution of diplomatic roles to the military would become inevitable.
- = Second, the formal relationship between the military and several branches of the government may require a serious reorientation. Better communication between the military and the government and reducing institutional differences will maximize the use of resources in pursuit of national security objectives. In today's rapidly changing world, an effective politico-military relationship alone should form the cornerstone of any national security policy. This argument emphasizes the increasing and important role of military advice in high level decision making, resource allocation, force development and its application.
- = Third, how far should the military attempt to influence policy and making within the country? An overdose of military influence on political outcomes can erode or threaten civilian control in a democratic society. It is therefore important to address the issues of civil-military friction candidly to ensure a healthy civil-military relationship. There is also a need to amicably disaggregate the leverages of the country's defence industry (OFs and DPSUs) and the scientific community, which have increasingly contributed to this rivalry. At yet another level, the armed forces might also have to ensure that reasonable transparency is extended to the country's strategic community in order to receive constructive feedback on their doctrinal evolution and issues of capability development.

The military challenge today lies in producing a politically conscious yet apolitical military leadership, which can clearly reconcile the centrality of the core values, interests and aspirations of the state, with their personal opinions and their professional duties. This involves a military leadership that can stand its professional ground but not one that places the organisation over institutional values. Since serious change could be impeded by institutional mindsets and practices, a profound shift in the vocabulary and imagery of all the stakeholders is extremely essential, and vital. This will necessitate the alteration of some longstanding military traditions, assumptions, processes and practices. All this is needed, but it would be important to pursue this change through small but incremental steps. Strong commitment demonstrated at the highest level and an amicable environment can expedite the process.

## Conclusion

Several experts argue that India's capacity to master the creation, deployment and use of military instruments is far from certain. The country's success will greatly depend on how it manages this disconnect between strategic opportunities, threats and challenges. India still remains focused more on "satisficing" hard power rather than "maximizing" it. No wonder some experts argue that India will therefore have to be content with remaining a middle power for at least for some time to come. If that position is to be comprehensively corrected, then the "transformational strategies" that are often spoken about will turn out to be vital for building a strong and assured Indian military capability.

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