

INDIA 2025

Chapter IV

External Security

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Speculating about India's external security environment at the end of a quarter century can only be an extremely hazardous exercise unless one has the capability to shroud it in verses like those of Nostradamus which will lend themselves to a whole range of interpretations. If we throw our minds back to 1975 and check whether at that stage how far India's present security environment could have been correctly predicted it would give an idea of the magnitude of the challenges of the task. Today the pace of change in international security environment has accelerated to make such exercises in futurology far more risky. There was a book written in the sixties titled Famine 1975 which predicted that famines would stalk India in the seventies. That was based on the developments on the food front in this country in the fifties and sixties and on food imports under PL-480. India stopped import of food in mid seventies because of the intense efforts launched through the green revolution. In respect of that development too there were many gloomy predictions by very respected economists that the green revolution would turn red.

Fully aware of this background it is proposed to adopt a very cautious approach in venturing a long term assessment on India's external security environment by 2025. No doubt such an assessment has to be based on extrapolation of current trends in international security developments. Some of them are mature ones and others incipient ones. Some of the radical changes are so recent that there may not be agreement that they constitute a trend and not episodic happenings. For instance there is still a consensus to develop whether the improvements in India's relationships with the US and the European Union and revival of the cordiality with Russia which got eroded in the nineties constitute an essential component of a global paradigm shift or not. There are also enormous uncertainties at the rate India will grow economically and liberalise and

how effectively India will be able to manage its social engineering problems. The following analysis will focus mostly on the international trends that are likely to impact adversely on India's security over the long period of 25 years.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait and annexed it the international community took very severe punitive action and restored the independence and sovereignty of Kuwait. The Pakistani attempt at 'salami-slicing' in the Kargil heights only led to the leading nations of international community revalidating the sanctity and inviolability of the line of control. The Croatian territory occupied by Serbia had to be given back under the Dayton accord. In the present international milieu any occupation of territory in violation of the status quo does not generally meet with approval of the comity of nations and allowed to go unchallenged. The probability is that this trend is likely to be strengthened. Therefore security threats by way of attempt at seizing our territory are not very likely though its occurrence cannot be ruled out as totally impossible. India is likely to maintain its conventional defence preparedness at a level adequate to meet such threats from Pakistan and China.

The Nuclear factor

Before India conducted the Shakti tests there were possibilities of the country being subjected to threat of use of nuclear weapons. According to the article 'Securing nuclear peace' written by the present Pakistani foreign minister Abdul Sattar, former foreign minister, Agha Shahi and retired Air chief, Air chief Marshal Zulfikhar Ali Khan in News International of 5 October, 1999. Pakistanis feel the value of their nuclear capability was illustrated on at least three occasions in mid 1980s, 1987 and 1990. In other words on these occasions they conveyed either an implied or explicit threat to India. The Kargil Review panel report has confirmed the explicit 1987 and implied 1990 threats. In the same

article the Pakistani authors acknowledge that the Kargil crisis both tested and illustrated the deterrence assumption. They argue that the crisis was contained by both parties. India has declared a no first use policy and so also China. While Pakistan refuses to declare a no first use policy it is obvious that in future it cannot assume that its nuclear blackmail would work given its own vulnerabilities and the Indian capabilities. Therefore while the nuclear factor would be a significant one in Indian security calculus India is not likely to face an asymmetric situation either real or perceived, to its disadvantage vis a vis Pakistan on the nuclear issue. India is a status quo power in terms of line of control in Kashmir. Therefore chances of clashes occurring due to violation of line of control or possibility of nuclear escalation arising out of such clashes are likely to have their origin in Pakistani behaviour and not India's. There is extreme sensitivity on the Indian side, as was demonstrated during the Kargil war, on not testing Pakistan's tolerance limits even while imposing on it condign punishment for aggression. The role of nuclear weapons in international security relations may continue as it is or hopefully may even decline. At this stage it is very difficult to foresee their role becoming more significant than they are today.

The ever increasing use of information technology (IT) in new weapons and more countries adopting the revolution in military affairs (RMA) are inevitable and India will have no option but to acquire those technologies. The pace of acquisition will no doubt depend on the international security developments. If as is expected India's economic growth will be at six percent and above then India should be able to afford to modernize its defence forces at a level of defence expenditure which in terms of percentage of gross domestic product should not unduly be burdensome. While India's external security environment from the point of view of nuclear and large scale conventional threats arising from its neighborhood appear to be manageable, on the basis of extrapolation of current trends it should be borne in mind that the Indian external security environment has to a large extent

been shaped by global developments in the last 50 years. That will continue to be so in the 21st century.

The neighbours

All military attacks India faced since its independence in 1947 except the Kargil one were attributable to cold war politics. Pakistan counted upon the support of Britain in 1947 and of US in 1965 and 1971. They also miscalculated about the nature of Indian response. As the Pakistani Columnist Altaf Gauhar wrote in a series of articles in the Nation during September – October 1999 under the title "Four wars and one assumption" Pakistanis believed the "Hindu morale would not stand more than a couple of hard blows at the right time and place". Now ten years after the end of the Cold war the US hails India as a partner. Though they have not publicly articulated it Pakistan is a state of concern for the US, European union and Russia. Even the Chinese have reasons to worry about Islamic fundamentalism centered in Pakistan. Increasingly Pakistan will find it difficult to rely on external support-both overt and covert- for its adventurism against India. In 1999 during the Kargil war and in the subsequent period it found itself isolated as never before from the international community. In these circumstances the threat from Pakistan is likely to be more adventurism in the form of proxy war than direct attack from any across the line of control.

With China there has been no major clash across the border since 1967. Though the line of actual control is yet to demarcated through mutual agreement, peace and tranquility have been maintained all along the border area. While neither China nor India has given up their demands in regard to any of their claimed areas there are reasonable grounds to hope that the present peace and tranquility can continue to be maintained till demarcation of the line of actual control can be achieved and a mutually acceptable border settlement can be reached. China has no interest in undermining the stability of the multilingual, multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious state of India because of its own

vulnerabilities in this respect vis a vis Tibet and Sinkiang. While India is in harmony with the mainstream international value system of pluralistic democracy China is not. In that sense China has more vulnerabilities than India has. The Indian nuclear tests and the ongoing development of Agni missile are likely to lead to stable mutual deterrence between the countries.

While China has at present a distinct lead over India in economic sphere there are possibilities of the gap between China and India narrowing in overall terms contributing to further stability in their relationship. The adoption of one child policy in China in the eighties is likely to create an unfavorable situation for that country vis a vis India in the next 10-15 years in terms of the ratio of productive to nonproductive sections of the populations. Secondly China is yet to go through the adjustment processes involved in democratization. Thirdly India as an English speaking country has an advantage in integrating with an increasingly globalising international community. The recent international political developments of India being accepted as a partner by US, Russia and the European union enhance the possibility of a stable global balance of power-consisting of US, China, European union, Russia, Japan and India. In these circumstances there are reasonable grounds to hope that China, while posing a political challenge to India is not likely to figure as an adverse factor in military security calculus of this country.

Terrorism and proxy war

All this does not mean that India has no need to worry about its external security environment. The nature of external security threats is likely to undergo a change. The United States, the mightiest power on earth fears that its security is likely to be threatened through indirect means- through terrorism sponsored from outside. Such a threat is more likely to be faced by relatively freer and open societies which are pluralistic. In the case of India it has been subjected to such a threat over the last two decades through terrorism

either encouraged and assisted or directly sponsored from outside. Such externally sponsored terrorism, which when sustained over a period of time involving a significant number of personnel is appropriately termed proxy war. Such covert campaign by one state or nonstate organization against another state is facilitated by four factors. The air travel and tourist industry make it easier for people to get in and out of nations of which they are not loyal citizens. Secondly very effective tools to practise terrorism are now available and can easily slip across national frontiers. Thirdly pluralistic states are more vulnerable to internal dissidence which can be utilized to attract extremist elements among them to wage a proxy war. Fourthly organized crime specially the narcotics trade and the facilities for money laundering made available by existing banking channels can easily be tapped by unscrupulous states to wage proxy war against others.

This is the kind of external security threat India should be prepared to face in the next quarter of a century. At the same time preparedness to meet the threats of limited and wider conventional wars and nuclear missile deterrence are needed as an insurance, especially to avoid provision of temptation to an adversary like Pakistan, given the history of that country's self delusions. Further nuclear weapons have been legitimized by the international community and is being used as a currency of power. It has been made into a necessary but not a sufficient condition for recognition as a global player. Even in the case of Japan it needs the US nuclear umbrella and it keeps itself in readiness to translate to the status of a nuclear- missile power at short notice. In spite of its being the sole victim of an unjustified nuclear attack Japan actively participated in legitimising the nuclear weapons and voted always in support of nuclear hegemonic powers. It is considering the possibility to participate in the American sponsored theatre nuclear missile defence programme indicating that neither Japan nor other nuclear weapon powers are likely to give up their nuclear weapons or dependence on extended deterrence and agree to nuclear disarmament in the foreseeable future.

The US has made clear its long term assessment on nuclear proliferation in an implicit manner. By putting in immense effort on the development of missile defence US has demonstrated that it believes that there will be no nuclear disarmament in the next 25 years and that there will be further nuclear and missile proliferation to other states of concern in spite of all the hype about the Nonproliferation Treaty and Comprehensive test ban treaty. The US also expects the proliferation to occur mostly in Asia. In those circumstances it is quite clear that India would have to pursue a modest nuclear and missile programmes. Since India is in any case a space power and intends to develop capabilities for launching geo- stationary satellites, missiles of appropriate range will be within India's capability without significant additional outlays. Such capabilities are also needed for an effective indigenously sustained space surveillance programme which is an essential component of the preparedness in the era of revolution in military affairs.

The revolution in military affairs envisages incorporating information technology, space based and high altitude surveillance and accurate terminal guidance for air, sea and ground launched stand off weapons. In due course it is logical to expect these technologies will spread and our potential adversaries will obtain such weapons. Therefore India too will need such technologies. It may be difficult to obtain such weapons by import in view of the selective and often discriminatory technology denial regimes put in place by advanced industrial nations. Therefore India needs to develop a long term strategy of self reliance. Unlike in the sixties and seventies when the Indian private industrial base was not adequately developed and therefore India had to rely mostly on the public sector for its weapon production from now on there has to be a deliberate attempt to develop the private sector in India to achieve the goal of self reliance.

India and International Status quo

India has embarked upon a high growth trajectory in economic development. Its poverty alleviation is making slow and steady if not spectacular progress. It is a nuclear

and missile power and aspires for a permanent seat in the Security Council. It is coming to be accepted as a major global player and one of the balancers in the global balance of power system. When any country moves from a lower level of prosperity and power to a higher level it upsets the existing regional and in some cases even global status quo. When that happens the system at regional level and global level, in cases where the country concerned has potential to become a global actor resists the transformation. This happened when Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan and China rose to great power status. Two world wars and the cold war resulted from the conflict between the status quo powers and the new rising ones. India's rise to the role of a global player, a knowledge based society, an information great power and fourth largest market is not likely to go unchallenged. However the existence of nuclear weapons virtually rules out wars of the type that occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries. The resistance to India's emergence as a global player is likely to be through covert means by targeting Indian economic development, and social and political integration.

All the other global players have had recognition of their status for quite some time. Britain, France and Japan are ex-imperial powers. Russia is the successor of former superpower USSR. China has built up its image of power since 1971 and is an acknowledged permanent member of the Security Council. Therefore the most challengeable among the emerging balancers is India. This country faces three kinds of challenges. First is the competition from the other balancing powers, some of whom would like to curb the power and influence of India. In the age of nuclear weapons this is likely to be done through means other than a formal war. Secondly given the geostrategic configuration of Southern Asia some of India's immediate neighbors would like to countervail India's growing influence and power by invoking countervailing factors. Thirdly there is the possibility of "conflict of civilisations " especially one arising out of religious extremism. The majority Indian public opinion does not subscribe to Professor Samuel

Huntington's thesis on "clash of civilisations". That is not as relevant as the issue whether Osama Ben Laden and other Jehadis subscribe to it or not. Here the term Jehad is not used in its higher meaning of spiritual struggle within oneself but in the popular political sense in which it is used by Taliban, Pakistani ruling elite, the extremist Islamic groups in West Asia and Central Asia.

All religious extremisms have their origins in the tension arising out of the inability of traditional elite, to adjust itself to the impact of modern technology and new social and political ideas and its attempt to resist change and go back to a mythical righteous order which never existed in reality in history. Societies which have not had a tradition of free interaction with the rest of the world and which have walled themselves off from the rest of humanity have a higher chance of generating religious extremism. Organised religions with a clergy with vested interests are more prone to this affliction than unorganised ones. When the latter attempt it they tend to model themselves on the former.

Since the rise in oil prices in the seventies some of the Islamic states have been spending significant sums of money in supporting the cause of Islam and a portion of this money went to nurture the mujahideen in Afghanistan. When the Soviet Union finally withdrew the mujahideen considered it as their victory over a super power. They felt emboldened to resort to terrorism in other countries such as India, Algeria, Chechenya, Central and West Asian countries. The Afghan mujahideen had Pakistan as their base during the war against the Soviet forces. Subsequently with assistance from Pakistani ex-servicemen and armed forces the Taliban overran most of Afghanistan. This has confirmed the Islamic extremists and the Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence Wing that they are in a position to unleash proxy war in any other country. They count Bosnia and Kosovo among their victories, Chechenya as a temporary setback and the on going attempts at destabilising Central Asian republics and Kashmir as pursuit of Jehad. The Taliban mujahideen are recruited when they are children and conditioned with years of

education only in religious texts and weapon training. They are brainwashed to believe that they would all become Ghazis, if they are killed in the Jehad.

Sending in these Jehadis into Kashmir or through other routes into India with arms, explosives, fake currency and drugs is a low cost operation. Pakistani elite and the ISI are likely to continue to indulge in it unless a radical attitudinal change takes place within Pakistan. That is not impossible as can be seen from what happened to Maoist China or Khomeini's Iran or Hitlerite Germany. That would come about only when the external pressures from the international community generates countervailing forces within Pakistan which will overwhelm the Jehadi forces. That will not be a violence free process. It could amount to a virtual civil war within that country with pressures on India. With some luck, it could be as non explosive as the change -over in China or Iran. If it does not turn out to be so, India and all other neighbors of Pakistan and Afganistan will have to be prepared for a prolonged struggle of attrition with the Jehadi forces.

The progress of this counter Jehadi campaign will in turn depend upon the success of the international community to curb the drug trade, centered on Pakistan cum Afghanistan region since the drug money finances the Jehad. It will also depend on the extent to which India and the international community can successfully counter other forms of organised crime-international money laundering, fake currency and smuggling and protection rackets within the country. These forms of organised crime are used by Pakistani Inter services Intelligence ((ISI) to carry out its campaign of proxy war and terrorism. Nepal and Bangladesh have been used as convenient bases for this purpose.

The threat within

The success of organised crime within the country is linked up with the nature of governance. Indian politics is charecterised by the dominance of the politician-bureaucracy -organised crime nexus. A number of our politicians and political parties are dependent on large sums of black money and muscle power used to win elections. Such

money is largely available from organised crime and in turn the latter ask for political patronage to protect their operations. That leads to linkages between organised crime, bureaucracy and political parties. Since the organised crime is basically anti-social and is primarily interested in money making most of the organised crime barons have by and large no sense of patriotism and are prepared to collaborate with foreign agencies to assist it in penetrating the country. In this way the external security threats and internal ones get linked up. Most of the politicians building their careers on the basis of linguistic, caste, communal and ethnic bases are less interested in overall national security considerations than in the parochial one of getting money for their politics. There is a certain amount of widely prevalent permissiveness in respect of politician- bureaucracy-organised crime nexus since the politicians and political parties not indulging in such dubious forms of fund raising for party political and electoral purposes happen to be exceptions rather than the rule. The of our coalition politics also involves major national parties having to depend upon all kinds of parties to sustain their majority. In an era in which proxy war and terrorism are likely to be the primary forms of external threats the politician-bureaucracy- organised crime nexus is a prime vulnerability in terms of external security threat.

This threat also extends to flow of fake currency into the country. In a country like ours where cash transactions dominate at ground level and black money constitutes a significant proportion of the economy the infusion of fake currency presents two kinds of threats. Firstly to our economy. Secondly the fake currency enables the adversary to obtain the services of individuals and groups in this country to act against our security interests at very low cost to itself. Once such conduits are established they are used to push in drugs, explosives, weapons and trained terrorists.

It is one of the basic convictions of the Pakistani ruling elite and national security establishment that the Indian unity is not sustainable and the caste, communal, linguistic

and ethnic tensions in India would lead to its disintegration. They are consequently on the constant look-out for such divisive forces surfacing and attempt to exacerbate such tensions. In that sense the tensions and divisions in our country and politics not only constitute an internal security threat but an external one as well. Today our electoral process is a highly divisive one. No thought has been devoted to ensure the process will be a unifying one. Often the electoral divisiveness becomes perpetual animosities.

Already people in this country are familiar with Pakistanis hacking through to our Websites and leaving their propaganda materials. As the use of computers increase and the country becomes increasingly reliant on internet it should also be prepared for a cyber attack on our economic infrastructural framework and other ways of conducting cyber assaults. This could be done by a hostile state actor; or a hostile non-state actor. Therefore our long term security interests demand that our cyber security is fully safeguarded both from the point of view of external and internal security.

There are possibilities of Pakistan being subjected to very severe economic, social and political stresses and strains if the ruling elite of that country does not mend its ways. Already the possibility of attempts to counter the obscurantist clergy- dominated extremist elements leading to a civil war situation has been referred to. Such contingencies may lead to refuge effluxes with pressures on our borders and increasing breakdown of governance in Pakistan. Such developments are likely to pose external security problems for this country. One should not overlook recently a Muhajir delegation was in India to apprise their cousins in this country of their sad plight in Pakistan.

The relatively rapid growth of India compared to its neighbouring states also draws in illicit immigrants into this country. It is believed that there are perhaps more than ten million illicit immigrants in India. This influx, if unchecked is likely to increase social tensions in various areas where the illicit immigrants tend to settle down in local

concentrations. They may also be targeted by state and non-state adversaries to be enlisted to wage a proxy war in this country.

The China factor

China, India's neighbour to the north is likely to constitute the most important international security problem in the years to come. It is the most populous state in the world but is yet not in harmony with the international democratic value system. At the same time in the globalising world with rapid advances in people to people communication China will find it difficult to continue to sustain its present system of economic pluralism and political centralism. The developments in China may follow one of the following three scenarios. Its economic pluralism may inexorably compel China to move towards political pluralism, democracy. If that were to happen China will accept the international value system. This perhaps is the best outcome to be expected. That does not necessarily mean that China would not be hegemonic. After all the US, the longest democracy in the world is a hegemonic power. However a democratic hegemonic power is better to deal with than a non- democratic one. It would also mean within China there will be less tension between it and non-Han populations. Since those minorities are on the periphery of China tensions on the border states of China is of concern to China's neighbours.

The second possibility is China manages to continue its present system of economic pluralism and political centralism. That would make China the most powerful corporate state in history and is not likely to reassure its neighbours. The growing Chinese influence on South east Asia , especially Myanmar, Central Asia and demographic pressure on Russian Siberia are likely to cause concern to international community.

The third alternative scenario is the possibility of mismatch between China's economic pluralism and political centralism leading to a break down of China. That would be a nightmare for all neighbours of China. Unlike in the Soviet Union where the Red Army had a tradition of non involvement in politics the Chinese PLA was the founder of

modern Chinese state and had intervened on a number of occasions in Chinese politics, the latest being the Tien An Men square in 1989. Therefore the evolution of China is bound to be world's primary security concern in the coming years. China's transition to democracy can be made relatively smooth if the major democracies of the world, US, European union, Japan, India and Russia collaborate in a balance of power system to embed china in a democratic Asia. If there are differences among them or US attempts to confront China through a national missile defence then incorporating China in an international democratic order may prove more difficult. Though the probability of a military confrontation between China and India is minimal, if not negligible, missile deterrent capability and acquiring and maintaining an adequate conventional military capability by India would help to stabilise the balance between the two.

A major factor in the long term Indian security environment is energy security. India has to develop friendly relations not only with energy producers but also countries which either dominate or constitute the routes of supply of energy material.

Security Management

The history of last fifty three years proves that the most difficult problem in our external security is not our capability to deal with them in terms of men and material but our inability to organise our national security planning and management framework in an effective manner to anticipate threats in time. If that is addressed with foresight half the task of managing the threat would be done. As of now there is not adequate awareness among our political, bureaucratic and services establishments about the need to study the long term future developments, the likely security problems they are likely to pose and the need to plan preparations to dissuade the potential adversaries from acting against our interests. This lack of awareness about the need for forward looking long range intelligence assessment is at the root of many of problems of optimal national security management. The Kargil report brings out how the apex intelligence assessment process

had been ignored. In the new arrangement constituting a National Security Council, by converting the Joint Intelligence Committee as National Security Council secretariat staff the present government, which proclaims a higher commitment to national security than its predecessors, has shown that its own understanding of scope of national security and its management process is no better than that of its predecessors.

The National Security Council though constituted on paper has not met (as of November 2000). Its task is to advise the government on long range assessments and planning for national security in a comprehensive sense. That is explicit in the Government resolution setting up the council. While day to day policy making and national security management are being attended to by the Cabinet Committee on National Security long term national security planning has not received the attention it deserves.

As the US author. George Tanham has pointed out Indians appear to be lacking a culture of strategic thinking. Indian policy making has by and large been reactive. This inability to anticipate long term trends and plan in time to meet adverse contingencies is seen not only in the field of national security but also in economic development. After fifty years of planning the country is handicapped by inadequate infrastructural development. Whether it is good governance, maintaining effective law and order and ensuring optimal economic growth all call for long term anticipatory thinking. In the case of external security threats, preparedness has long lead time. The Indian thought process was illustrated by some of our leaders raising the question at the time of 1998 Shakti tests against what threats were those tests needed, as though one could prepare against a nuclear threat after they materialise. The apathy of our political class to matters of national security is illustrated by the Parliament and political parties not debating the draft nuclear doctrine even after one year since it was published. Similarly the Pakistani intrusion at Kargil was subject to intense political debate as the fighting was on. Now a detailed report has been

published with all details of intelligence available for a year before the intrusion and there does not appear to be much interest in debating it.

There is not adequate awareness of long range national security threats among the Indian political class as a whole. Consequently national security issues are tended to be tackled reactively as and when they arise. The issues of external security referred to earlier need to be anticipated and acted upon in time. The major factor that would stand in the way of meeting effectively the external security challenges is an internal one-the politician-beueaucracy-organised crime nexus. Not only the political class is corrupt there is also a large amount of permissiveness among the masses about corruption which is the most serious security vulnerability in the age of terrorism and cyber assault. India can stave off any external security threat if it is not betrayed by the fifth column of politician-organised crime-bureaucratic nexus.

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