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NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE IN LIMBO: A TWO-DECADE-OLD PUZZLE

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The formulation of India's National Security Strategy (NSS) is back in the spotlight following recent remarks by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) at a book-release event. In a significant and controversial statement, the CDS suggested that while India already addresses policy, processes, and practices required for national security, the absence of a written NSS document should not be a cause for concern. He further questioned the insistence on formal codification of such a strategy.



WHAT IS NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE?

A National Security Doctrine (NSD) is a comprehensive framework outlining a country's national interests and security objectives, including how to protect against both traditional and non-traditional threats. It guides military, diplomatic, economic, and social policies aimed at safeguarding national security.

KEY ASPECTS OF A NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE (NSD)

1. Defining National Interests: Clarifies core objectives like territorial integrity, economic security, and citizens' safety.

- 2. Identifying Threats and Opportunities:** Assesses traditional (e.g., military, terrorism) and non-traditional (e.g., cyber, climate) threats, along with strategic opportunities.
- 3. Outlining Response Mechanisms:** Specifies tools of response—military, diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and internal security.
- 4. Guiding Policy and Strategy:** Provides a strategic framework for coherent national security policymaking and long-term planning.
- 5. Enhancing Institutional Coordination:** Ensures synergy among military, intelligence, diplomatic, and law enforcement agencies.
- 6. Promoting Strategic Clarity:** Offers clear national security priorities, enabling effective resource use and policy execution.

DOCTRINES RELATED TO SECURITY IN INDIA

Doctrine	Main Objective
Cold Start Doctrine	Enables swift, limited conventional strikes below the nuclear threshold, ensuring rapid mobilisation along the western front.
Nuclear Doctrine	Guided by principles of No First Use , Credible Minimum Deterrence , and Assured Massive Retaliation in case of a nuclear attack.
Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Warfare	Focused on counter-terrorism and insurgency using minimum force while simultaneously winning local support.
Joint Armed Forces Doctrine (2017)	Aims for synergy among the Army, Navy, and Air Force, with emphasis on cyber, space, and information domain operations.
Maritime Security Doctrine	Enhances India's maritime reach through coastal defence, anti-piracy missions, and Indian Ocean Region (IOR) vigilance to support Blue Water aspirations.

WHY INDIA NEEDS A NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

- 1. Diverse Threat Spectrum:** India faces varied challenges—cross-border terrorism, cyber threats, and internal insurgencies—which demand a unified, proactive framework.
- 2. Ad Hoc Strategic Posture:** India's responses to security threats often appear tactical and reactive (e.g., 2016 surgical strikes, 2019 Balakot airstrikes) in the absence of a defined doctrine.
- 3. Lack of Institutional Coordination:** Agencies like IB, RAW, NIA, and the military often work in isolation, as seen during 26/11, underlining the need for seamless coordination.
- 4. Public Assurance and Global Deterrence:** A clear doctrine boosts citizen confidence and sends a strong message to adversaries regarding India's strategic resolve.
- 5. Strategic Defence Procurement:** Procurement decisions (like Rafale, S-400) lack a coherent long-term vision, which a doctrine can help align with national priorities.

INSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL HURDLES

Issue	Explanation
Partisan Politics	Security often takes a back seat to electoral interests, impeding bipartisan support for key strategies.

Issue	Explanation
Idealistic Approach to Strategy	Hesitancy in implementing hard reforms reflects reluctance to accept evolving security dynamics.
Fragmented Institutional Setup	Weak inter-agency information sharing hampers strategic unity and efficiency.
Civil-Military Disconnect	Limited involvement of the armed forces in policy-making leads to operational gaps in strategy formulation.
Weak Strategic Culture	India still lacks a deeply institutionalised, long-term strategic mindset as seen in countries like the US or China.

KEY REFORMS IN INDIA'S SECURITY FRAMEWORK

- 1. National Security Council (NSC):** Apex body for national security decision-making, chaired by the Prime Minister and advised by the NSA, NSAB, and JIC.
- 2. Defence Planning Committee (DPC):** Coordinates inter-ministerial input to develop security and defence strategies under the NSA's leadership.
- 3. Chief of Defence Staff (CDS):** Responsible for joint military operations, integration of tri-services, and heading the Department of Military Affairs.
- 4. Integrated Capability Development Plan (ICDP):** A strategic roadmap spanning 10 years to synchronise defence acquisitions with evolving threats and operational needs.
- 5. Cybersecurity & Self-Reliance:** Strengthening national cyber defence through NCIIPC and CERT-IN; promoting indigenous defence production under Atmanirbhar Bharat.

ENHANCING NATIONAL SECURITY THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Engagement	Strategic Value
QUAD	Indo-Pacific cooperation, cybersecurity initiatives, and naval drills (Malabar Exercise).
2+2 Dialogues	Institutionalised annual dialogues with US, Japan, Russia, and Australia for defence and foreign policy alignment.
India-US Defence Pacts	LEMOA (logistics), COMCASA (secure communications), BECA (geospatial data sharing) deepen interoperability.
France-India Strategic Ties	Joint naval missions, Rafale procurement, space collaboration, and Indian Ocean surveillance.
India-Israel Security Cooperation	Robust defence ties including drones, missile systems, and counterterrorism post-26/11.
Multilateral Platforms (SCO/BRICS)	Engagement in global counterterrorism efforts through SCO-RATS, FATF, etc.

WAY FORWARD

- 1. Integrated Command and Response Structure:** A Centralised Command and Control (C3) setup is essential for coordinated and swift crisis management.
- 2. Balanced, Transparent Framework:** The NSD must balance national security interests with democratic values and civil liberties to maintain public trust.
- 3. Technology-Driven Modernisation:** Seamless incorporation of AI, cyber tools, drones, and space technologies in strategic planning.
- 4. Linking NSD with NSS:** The National Security Doctrine should offer a strategic vision while the National Security Strategy (NSS) must translate it into operational plans.
- 5. Broad-Based Strategic Consensus:** Establish a National Security Advisory Council with representatives from military, academia, civil services, and technical experts to ensure inclusivity and depth

CONCLUSION

India's geopolitical environment and evolving threat matrix demand the articulation of a comprehensive National Security Doctrine. This doctrine must integrate diplomatic, military, and economic strategies to strengthen India's deterrence capability, operational preparedness, and global stature. Institutional reform, technological adoption, and inclusive policymaking will be the pillars of a secure and resilient India.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q. With reference to India's National Security Framework, consider the following statements:

1. The National Security Council is headed by the President of India.
2. India's Nuclear Doctrine adheres to the principle of "No First Use."

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: B

MAINS QUESTIONS

Q. "The absence of a formal National Security Doctrine (NSD) poses a challenge to India's strategic preparedness." Examine the need for a codified NSD in the Indian context.

(250 words, 15 marks)



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