

# NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE: POLITY/GOVERNANCE

**NEWS:** It's time India framed a national security doctrine

## WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

India currently lacks a unified National Security Doctrine (NSD), relying instead on fragmented and reactive approaches. With rising conventional and emerging tech-driven threats, there is an urgent need for a formal, modern NSD to ensure strategic clarity and preparedness.

### Context: The Need for a National Security Doctrine (NSD)

- Amid recurring conflicts with Pakistan and increasing security threats from China, there is renewed emphasis on formulating a formal National Security Doctrine (NSD).
- India currently relies on fragmented operational directives and reactive responses, lacking a unified and codified strategic framework.

### What is a National Security Doctrine (NSD)?

- A strategic document that articulates a nation's core security principles, threat perceptions, and response mechanisms.
- Guides the use of military, diplomatic, economic, technological, and societal tools to preserve sovereignty, stability, and citizen safety.
- Unlike countries like the US, China, or Russia, India does not have a publicly declared or formalised NSD.

### Existing Doctrines in India

- Nuclear Doctrine (2003): No First Use, credible minimum deterrence, and massive retaliation if attacked.
- Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces (2017): Emphasizes inter-service synergy and integrated operations.

- Cold Start Doctrine (undeclared): Focuses on quick and limited conventional strikes against Pakistan.
- Raksha Mantri's Operational Directive (2009): A classified document with broad strategic and military directives.
- Doctrine of Surgical Strikes (post-2016): Policy of pre-emptive, targeted strikes to deter cross-border terrorism.
- Joint Doctrine for Cyberspace Operations (2024): Institutionalised tri-service coordination in cyberspace through the Defence Cyber Agency.

## Why India Needs a National Security Doctrine?

### 1. Shift from Reactive to Proactive Posture

- India responds after crises (e.g., Pulwama 2019, Galwan 2020) rather than anticipating and deterring threats.
- A formal NSD would enable pre-emptive planning and threat anticipation.

### 2. Clarifying Nuclear Ambiguity

- India's No First Use policy is morally grounded but often misread as weakness.
- NSD would clarify the deterrence logic, red lines, and retaliation policy (e.g., massive vs. focused action).

### 3. Institutional Coordination

- National security efforts suffer from inter-agency fragmentation.
- An NSD would define roles and protocols for coordination among armed forces, intelligence, and civilian bodies.

### 4. Addressing Emerging Threats

- Current approach is inadequate against cyberattacks, AI-driven radicalisation, crypto-terrorism, and grey-zone warfare.

- NSD would integrate technology-centric and hybrid warfare preparedness.

## 5. Escalation Policy and Red Lines

- Lack of defined escalation ladders allows adversaries like China and Pakistan to exploit India's ambiguity.
- NSD would define thresholds, triggers, and proportionate responses.

## 6. Strategic Asset Deployment

- Despite possessing systems like Agni-5, INS Arighaat, India lacks strategic guidance on how to deploy these.
- NSD would institutionalise power projection doctrines.

## 7. Whole-of-Nation Security Vision

- Security is often seen through a military or internal law enforcement lens.
- NSD would embed economic, environmental, cyber, and diplomatic strategies into national security thinking.

## Philosophical and Civilizational Foundations for NSD

### 1. Gita's Doctrine of Just War (Yuddhaya Krita Nischaya)

- Upholds the moral duty to fight for justice and order when necessary.

### 2. Chanakya's Mandala Theory

- Advocates realpolitik, pre-emptive security, and strategic alliances to manage threats, especially from neighbours.

### 3. Ashokan Diplomacy

- Symbol of soft power, using culture and non-violence to expand influence—basis for India's "Neighbourhood First" and vaccine diplomacy.

#### 4. Buddha and Gandhi's Ahimsa

- Inspires India's No First Use nuclear policy, balancing restraint with deterrence.

#### 5. Rajadharma – Duty of the State

- Ancient Indian texts emphasise that protecting citizens and sovereignty is the highest moral obligation of the state.

#### Attempts at a National Security Strategy (NSS) So Far

- Kargil Review Committee (2000): Recommended restructuring and strategic guidance post-Kargil War.
- Naresh Chandra Task Force (2012): Suggested reforms in defence and intelligence architecture.
- National Security Advisory Board (NSAB): Drafted NSS documents but not formally adopted.
- National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS): Presently coordinating inputs from ministries to formulate a draft strategy.

#### Challenges in Framing a National Security Doctrine

##### 1. Political Hesitation

- Lack of bipartisan consensus; fear of political accountability and criticism in future.

##### 2. Secrecy vs Transparency Dilemma

- Public doctrine could expose strategic gaps; a fully classified one defeats deterrence purposes.

##### 3. Bureaucratic and Institutional Fragmentation

- Ministries and agencies work in silos, with no single doctrine-writing authority.

##### 4. Risk of Rigidity

- Critics argue a fixed doctrine might limit adaptability in fast-changing geopolitical scenarios.

#### 5. Absence of Strategic Culture

- Emphasis has traditionally been on crisis management, not long-term strategic thinking.

#### 6. Operational-Strategic Disconnect

- Tactical doctrines like Cold Start or Cyber Doctrine exist, but lack overarching strategic vision and integration.

### Global Examples of Doctrinal Frameworks

#### United States

- Publishes a National Security Strategy every few years outlining military, economic, climate, and diplomatic goals.

#### Russia

- NSD prioritises nuclear deterrence, cyberwarfare, and military preparedness, with justification for pre-emptive action.

#### China

- No singular NSD, but Defense White Papers outline Active Defence and grey-zone warfare tactics.

#### United Kingdom

- Uses the Integrated Review, combining diplomacy, defence, economic, and environmental strategies.

### Way Forward: Recommendations for India

#### 1. Draft a Public and Classified NSD

- NSCS must lead the creation of a comprehensive doctrine, with:
  - A public version for strategic messaging.

- A classified version for tactical planning.

## 2. Incorporate Comprehensive Threat Matrix

- Cover external, internal, technological, and economic threats including cross-border terrorism, China's cyber dominance, and Northeast insurgency.

## 3. Whole-of-Nation Approach

- Synchronise strategies across military, intelligence, diplomacy, economy, and civil society.

## 4. Embrace Technology and Define Strategic Posture

- Adapt doctrines for AI, cyber, space, drone, and quantum warfare.
- Clarify India's stance on first use, retaliation, and hybrid warfare.

## 5. Strengthen Maritime and Intelligence Assets

- Secure Indo-Pacific interests, collaborate through Quad, Colombo Security Conclave, and strengthen intelligence integration across agencies.

## 6. Build Resilience and Align Commands

- Tackle grey-zone warfare and misinformation; align Northern, Western, and Maritime Commands with NSD directives.

## 7. Institutionalise Reviews and Indian Ethos

- Review NSD every 5 years through NSCS.
- Infuse doctrine with India's philosophical traditions of dharma and shakti—balance restraint and realpolitik.

## Conclusion

- A formal National Security Doctrine is urgently needed to bring strategic clarity, pre-emptive capability, and institutional coherence to India's defence and security landscape.

- By rooting its doctrine in civilizational values and modern threats, India can safeguard its sovereignty, stability, and global stature with both moral authority and strategic strength.

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