EDITORIAL: INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION   **DATE: 10.05.2025**
TOPIC: NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

It's time India framed a national security doctrine

Introduction: The Case for a National Security Doctrine

- India currently lacks a **comprehensive national security doctrine** that integrates military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural strategies.

- In the face of **evolving geopolitical threats**, such a doctrine is essential for:

    - Enhancing **deterrence**,

    - Ensuring **strategic clarity**,

    - Expanding **India's influence** in the region and globally.

Necessity of a Doctrinal Approach

1. Historical Context: Tactical Wins, Strategic Vacuum

- India has won **three wars with Pakistan** and maintains military strength, but these victories were **tactical**, not strategic.

- There is **no unified doctrine** that prevents future conflicts or shapes long-term security goals.

- The **2003 Nuclear Doctrine** introduced a *No First Use* policy but **has not deterred aggression**:

    - China's border provocations continue.

    - Pakistan-backed cross-border terrorism persists.

2. Strategic Limitations of Current Policy

- India's defence approach is largely **reactive**, not proactive.

    - Responds after provocations rather than deterring them in advance.

- Smaller neighbours like **Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives** are increasingly **aligning with rival powers** like China.

    - This reflects **India's lack of a strategic outreach** or regional vision.

Lessons from China's Strategic Doctrine

1. China's Use of Strategic Philosophy

- China's doctrine draws inspiration from **Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War'**, prioritizing psychological, economic, and diplomatic domination over open conflict.

- Since its war with Vietnam in 1979, China has:

  - Avoided major military conflicts.

  - Expanded its **geopolitical footprint** via the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, debt diplomacy, and global trade partnerships.

2. Strategic Contrast with India

- China uses a **cohesive long-term strategy** to control the narrative and shape outcomes.

- India's fragmented and reactive posture has:

  - Allowed **border incursions** (e.g. Doklam, Galwan).

  - Enabled continued **terror threats** from Pakistan without strategic consequences.

Limitations of India's Current Security Policy-Making

1. Inconsistent Philosophical Foundations

- India's **No First Use (NFU)** policy stems from a **moral posture** of peace and restraint.

  - While reflecting India's image as a peaceful power, it may be seen as **passive** or lacking resolve.

- There is a **philosophical disconnect** between India's rich strategic heritage (e.g. Krishna's doctrine of righteous war in the Mahabharata) and its current soft approach.

2. Policy Paralysis and Strategic Confusion

- There are ongoing internal **debates about revising the NFU**, but **no clear decision** has been made.

  - This creates **uncertainty** for adversaries and **undermines deterrence**.

3. Fragmented and Militarized View of Security

- Overemphasis on **military solutions** ignores the role of **soft power**, diplomacy, and social influence.

- India lacks an integrated strategy that balances **kinetic and non-kinetic tools**.

4. Ignored Ancient Indian Strategic Thought

- Ancient Indian thinkers like **Chanakya** and **Ashoka** employed broad security tools:

  - **Chanakya's Mandala Theory** advocated influencing distant neighbours through alliances and diplomacy.

  - **Ashoka** used **Buddhist diplomacy and cultural propagation** to build peace around his empire.

Way Forward: Recommendations for a Doctrinal Framework

1. Define Core Principles

- **Preventive Deterrence**:

  - Shift focus from fighting wars to **preventing conflicts**.

  - Employ doctrines like **"unacceptable damage"** to deter both nuclear threats and terrorism.

- **Multi-Dimensional Security**:

  - Combine **military strength** with **diplomacy, economy, and culture**.

  - Use **soft power**, such as language, cinema, and spiritual heritage, in neighbouring regions.

- **Flexibility and Adaptability**:

  - Create a doctrine with **guiding principles**, not rigid rules.

  - Allow policies to **evolve with changing threats**, technologies, and geopolitical shifts.

2. Define End Goals

- **Strategic Autonomy**:

  - Maintain **independent foreign policy** free from the binary of being grouped with Pakistan or aligned against China under Western terms.

- **Sphere of Influence**:

  - Re-establish India's **leadership in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific**.

  - Use **proactive diplomacy, trade corridors**, and **connectivity projects** to counter China's BRI.

Conclusion: The Need for Strategic Coherence

- Without a **codified national security doctrine**, India:

- Remains **vulnerable to repeated provocations**.

- Appears **inconsistent** to both adversaries and allies.

- A doctrine would:

  - Provide **clarity of intent** and **project strength**.

  - Move India from **romantic ideals to realistic, multi-domain strategies**.

  - Ensure a **cohesive and enduring framework** for India's security and global role.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/ram-madhav-india-framed-national-security-doctrine-9993537/