
Forging India's Hard Power in the New Century

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Introduction

Geography, technology and culture determine a state's preference for hard power. States often tend to pursue multiple national security objectives – some more imagined than real. For the Indian state, which aspires to carve out an independent path in the international system, its rise in regional or global power status will require capable and usable instruments of force. These will be imperative in the continental and maritime contexts. Furthermore, the contemporary world demands that the state's ability to field a viable military force comprising land, air and sea-based components will have to be optimally integrated with other measures of state power. These are essentially three-fold: the economic prowess of the state, the cohesion of its institutions, and the political stability within the country. In this context, how India fashions its hard power to secure the country against external and internal threats will depend to a large extent on its ability to address several factors.

This article attempts to analyse the problem of fashioning India's hard power in the new century. The issue is discussed at four levels: first, the opportunities that currently drive India's military rise; second, the challenges and threats that the country might have to face in the immediate or foreseeable future; third, the myriad organisational limitations and hurdles that restrict the national capacity to tackle these challenges and threats; and, finally, the structural changes that

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are necessary to build India's military efficacy in the medium to long term. The author argues that India's capacity to shape the instruments of military force is still not assured at this point in time, and its future success will depend on how the country's political and military leadership manages to reconcile the several disconnects that exist among the strategic opportunities, military threats and organisational challenges that it faces.

Strategic Opportunities

The strategic drivers that contribute to India's rise as a regional power, and a military power of some significance, are essentially three-fold. These are, namely, India's high rate of economic growth; the emerging national vision and power aspirations; and the evolving strategic partnerships with other great powers at the global and regional levels. While there are other important factors that contribute to a nation's military growth and expertise, these drivers chiefly contribute to the fielding of combat power in the Indian context.

Economic Growth: A military needs to be equipped with modern weapon platforms and systems, which are sophisticated and effective in any situation, priced in huge numbers. For a country like India, which has to deal not simply with questions of territorial integrity, but development and equitable growth, sound economic performance becomes a key imperative in national growth. A vibrant economy alone can deliver national defence and socio-economic development, and in turn, increased levels of military preparedness in times of crisis. Good tools of trade and men who use these tools cost big money, and it will be impossible to acquire them without a sustained annual growth rate of 8 to 10 per cent. Fortunately, the current growth rate and increased access to high technology – whether imported or indigenous – appear to be changing these perspectives. India's military expenditure on procurement of capital items alone is expected to grow from US\$ 13.1 billion in 2010-11 to US\$ 19.2 billion by 2014-15 [even when the projected budgetary allocation would have fallen to 1.76 percent in Financial Year (FY) 2014-15, as per the Thirteenth Finance Committee report]. However, one might argue that India's technocratic approach towards transforming its military can be misleading

since this might not address issues of organisational structure and institutional culture. A modest budgetary allocation to defence should, therefore, be adequate; however, what is more important will be the optimal utilisation of the allocated resources to acquire the desired military capabilities.

National Vision and Aspirations: India's ability to fashion its hard power in the future will depend on how the country shapes its national strategic vision and the decision-making apparatus across several departments and disciplines. This will be the key component in managing the acquisition of great power status for the country, and, in turn, the military capabilities required to leverage its international position. Consequentially, the national security interests that India seeks to achieve will also form the basis of its future defence policy, planning and force structuring. Whether India can develop the political institutions that allow it to clearly define its military objectives, and, in turn, allow it to mobilise the resources for economic growth effectively, would be important. This vision can allow the Indian state to forge its strategic resources in terms of money, manpower and material (3Ms) efficiently into usable instruments of force. Currently, there exists an acute planning deficit and that, 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, including the national security strategy alone can help secure India's unhindered economic and technological growth.

Strategic Partnerships: Another important strategic driver would be whether the Indian state is capable of leveraging the existing international and regional systems to its advantage. India's notion of multipolarity might not be a practical proposition for the foreseeable future, as the international system might continue to remain unipolar for at least the next few decades. Consequently, the challenge for India is to develop a viable strategic partnership with important countries that serve both mutual and India's own interests to balance or counter the inimical forces in the neighbourhood. The United States, Russia, Japan and the European Union (EU) will form important components of these strategic partnerships. Countries with complementing interests in West, Southeast and Central Asia will also assume importance. India will have to figure out as to 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 it need not come at cost of the other when pursued simultaneously. China too will figure prominently in this relationship. By doing so, India will have the flexibility, both political and

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diplomatic, to manoeuvre within the emerging international system with relative ease. And from a purely military perspective, it will be in India's overall interest to develop productive and collaborative defence relationships with a range of countries globally. Viable strategic partnerships can not only open up avenues for acquisition of military technologies of the future, but would also enable adoption of defence best practices and procedures that are much needed in the domestic context.

India occupies a predominant geo-strategic position in South Asia. Some analysts argue that, while India's geographic location makes eminent sense, its natural boundaries are, nevertheless, weak and susceptible. The critical security concerns that drive India's hard power in terms of its war-fighting doctrines and capabilities must encompass measures for effective border management, means to deter internal and external threats, and substantive capacity for maritime security. So, how does the Indian state envision its regional security needs that include diverse policy and planning aspects of peace-keeping, peace-making, and post-conflict stability operations? How does it acquire the military capabilities that are required even in meeting the most minimal set of operational contingencies that it could face in the future? It will have to develop joint military force structures and operational practices to maintain and deliver these wide ranging military capabilities.

Limitations and Inhibitions

Some limitations that impede the country's preparedness to face various internal and external threats, and its ability to deliver well trained and tailor-made forces to tackle these threats, are discussed below. These hurdles can be seen at six broad levels: policy, planning, doctrinal evolution, capability development, civil-military relations and professional military education. These are surely not all encompassing but simply indicate the magnitude of the strategic dilemma that faces the country.

Policy: India has no formal document that systematically articulates the country's national security aims, objectives, and strategy. Successive

governments and the parliamentary standing committee on defence, and India's strategic community have acknowledged the absence of a national security strategy. The National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) too has emphasised the need for a comprehensive document on India's national security which will constitute the basis of the nation's defence planning objectives, and in particular the long-term military capability development plans (LTIPP). The absence of an overarching national strategic guidance handicaps the defence policy-makers and practitioners, thereby leading to military choices which at times may not find favour with the highest decision-making bodies within the country.

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Planning: Considering that the key to future military outcomes or operational success lies in the integration of the three Services, it is important to have a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) to provide single-point military advice to the government. It is, therefore, necessary to identify the common operational and logistical footprint of the three Services with a view to evolve shared and cost-effective operating procedures and practices. At yet another level, there might also be a need to reevaluate India's military's teeth to tail ratio (T3R), and, consequentially, maintain an optimal, cost-effective and efficient, and, above all, lethal war-fighting machine for the future. Inter-Service integration and right sizing of the three Services alone can help the Indian armed forces to forge the cutting edge capabilities that are needed for war-fighting in the 21st century. Above all, there is a need to integrate the military hierarchy with the national security and decision-making structures, failing which the use of force or the threat of use of force may not be optimal in times of crisis.

Doctrinal Evolution: The Indian armed forces have seen significant doctrinal evolution in the last decade. For instance, the Indian Air Force (IAF) was the first Service to release its operational doctrine in the year 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 roadmap for a blue water navy. However, the principal concern here is that these Service specific doctrines were developed in a stand-alone mode, and at different points of

time. The organisational motivations to formulate them were also different, and, hence, there is a serious need to harmonise these doctrines in conformity with the military challenges and threats of the future. Notwithstanding their currency, status and operational utility, six inter-related issues assume importance in the national security context.

- First, there is a need to evolve a pan-Indian border security framework, and a 24x7 border management strategy, to guard the country's long and porous frontiers from infiltration, intrusions and incursions, and also attempts of demographic inversion which might be deliberate or otherwise. New technology and better inter-agency coordination alone can form the basis of an effective border management strategy.
- Second, there is a need to evolve a multi-agency counter-terrorism framework, and an appropriate counter-terrorism strategy, to deal with the myriad internal security threats. The counter-terrorism strategy should be scalable where the employment of the armed forces must constitute the instrument of last resort. However, till such time the paramilitary organisations are fully geared to deal with internal security threats, the tenuous situation (s) along the border areas and even in the hinterland might continue to be handled by the army.
- Third, there is need to maintain sufficient conventional military deterrent in terms of our war-fighting capabilities on land, in the air and sea in order to deter or dissuade our potential military adversaries from indulging in any misadventure. Increasingly, this military capability will have to carry a greater seaward bias wherein a tri-Service force should be able to secure our trade and commerce interests in the Indian Ocean region, and even beyond. Introduction of hi-tech weapon platforms and systems, organisational unity and cohesion, and speed and lethality in the delivery of combat power over land, sea and aerospace will form the basis of India's conventional military deterrent in the future.
- Fourth, a multi-agency approach comprising elements of the Ministry of External Affairs, the Defence Ministry, and several other civil affairs departments associated with national security might be necessary to deliver the regional security needs in the future. Varying politico-military contingencies might demand different types of response ranging from civilian, to paramilitary, to military assistance. The common denominator in each of these situations will be the immediacy of assistance. India's military will, therefore, have to build diverse capabilities and be ready at all times to successfully render the necessary assistance.

- Fifth, a secure, survivable and tri-Service second strike nuclear capability will be essential to back up India's conventional military capabilities in the future. This will entail a viable nuclear doctrine and efficacy of its arsenal to the satisfaction of the controlling and operating units. 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 our adversaries.
- Sixth, there is a need to evolve a counter-strategy to deal with emerging disruptive threats such as biological, cyber, space, electronic warfare, etc. Developing strategic responses to such threats will soon become a principal doctrinal need in the times to come.

Capability Development: Currently, there are structural and procedural limits to which the country can develop appropriate war-fighting capabilities for the three Services. At present, the Indian military's capability development is driven by large-scale defence imports, especially in the category of hi-tech weapon platforms and systems. At yet another level, the temptation to develop everything indigenously from an assault rifle, to main battle tanks, and advanced combat systems has yielded very few successes. The stasis in the indigenisation of military technology can only be remedied by creating better facilities for defence research, development, production, increased public-private partnerships, and through hard systemic corrections in the defence acquisition process. Even if these reforms are successfully implemented, there is one aspect that simply cannot be ignored. It is that the demand of advanced war-fighting equipment in the Indian armed forces will continue to be relatively small, and the resulting economies of scale might not permit the development of end-to-end technical knowhow to produce expensive and complex weapon systems. In the context of defence procurement, there is an urgent need to graduate beyond the first generation acquisition reforms and move towards the timely "delivery" of our military capability needs.

Civil-Military Relations: Civil-military relations are at the core of any national security framework and the decision-making process within the country. 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 national security decision-making process is important. Cross-pollination of national security structures with defence expertise could contribute to better understanding on matters military and use of force, and, consequently, the

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overall strategic thinking within the country. In the short-to-medium term, it would entail the functional integration of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Service Headquarters (HQ), creation of a CDS, representation of military staff in national security structures such as the National Security Council (NSC) and NSAB, leveraging the function of military diplomacy in pursuit of India's foreign policy objectives, consistency in military budgeting and expenditure, procedural reforms in the acquisition process and defence industry, and ensuring adequate operational preparedness levels to meet a wide range of military and non-traditional threats.

Military Education: Military leaders must think critically, communicate well, and, above all, demonstrate acute 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 tactical, operational and strategic levels. Exposure to strategic and military studies, both at home and abroad, could provide the much-needed impetus for development of doctrinal thought and strategies, and the technological inclination among the armed forces. As a matter of national security interest, it is expedient to invest in professional military education (PME) in order to train and develop military officers capable of dealing with the complex politico-military and operational contingencies of the future. Frequent military exchanges and overseas deployment could contribute towards the development of new military thought and organisational practices.

Necessary Changes

The changed security environment calls for refashioning the creation and use of hard power, which may have to be managed differently in the future. A few issues that merit attention are discussed below.

- First, the military will increasingly be encumbered with non-traditional security threats and 'foreign policy type' responsibilities, and, therefore, there might be a greater need to quasi-militarise the country's diplomatic machinery. As the government resources would never be sufficient to

pursue pressing national security interests and objectives, a measured devolution of the diplomatic roles to the armed forces would become inevitable.

- Second, the formal relationship between the military and several other branches of the government may require a serious reorientation. How well, and to what effect, the military and the government communicate with each other, and what more could be done to reduce their institutional differences can alone maximise the use of strategic resources such as money, manpower and material (3Ms) in pursuit of national security interests and objectives. In today's rapidly changing world, an effective politico-military relationship alone should form the cornerstone of any national security policy and decision-making process. This argument emphasises the increasing and important role of military expertise and advice in higher level decision-making, resource allocation, force development and its application.
- Third, an overdose of military influence on political or national outcomes could erode or even threaten the civilian control over the military hierarchy in a democratic society. It is, therefore, important to address the issues of civil-military disconnect or friction more candidly and honestly to ensure a healthy civil-military relationship in the future. There will also be a need to disaggregate the leverages of the country's defence industry (ordnance factories and defence public sector undertakings) and the scientific community, which have increasingly contributed to this civil-military bureaucratic rivalry. At yet another level, the armed forces might also have to ensure that sufficient transparency is extended to the country's strategic community in order to receive constructive feedback on their doctrinal evolution and issues of capability development in the long term.

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The military challenge today lies in producing a military leadership that can reconcile the centrality of the national core values, interests and aspirations with their personal opinions and their professional views. This means neither

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producing institutional ‘yes-men’, nor a military leadership 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. There will, therefore, be a need to alter some of the long standing military traditions, assumptions, processes and practices. All this is much needed, but it would be important to pursue this change through small but incremental steps. Strong commitment demonstrated at the highest level towards organisational reform and an amicable environment alone can expedite the process of change.

Conclusion

Several experts argue that India’s capacity to master the creation, deployment and use of military force is still not assured at this point in time. This essay has attempted to highlight some of these concerns to some extent, if not all. The country’s success will greatly depend on how the national leadership manages this disconnect among the strategic opportunities, threats and challenges that have been identified. Simply put, India might not succeed in this endeavour because of its lack of “an instinct for power” or the innate reluctance to use military force in times of crisis. India remains focussed on “satisfying” hard power rather than “maximising” it. No wonder, some experts argue that India will have to be content with remaining a middle power for at least some time to come. And if that position is to be convincingly reversed, then the “transformational strategies” that are often spoken about, may turn out to be extremely important for building a strong Indian military capability.