



# **NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION-MAKING IN INDIA**

RSIS Monograph No. 27

Bibhu Prasad Routray



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S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

**I**ronically, the generic argument that the national security decision-making process in India has been mired in both structural and functional flaws coexists with an enormous interest in the ways the country makes its decisions pertaining to national security. Many of India's national security concerns have been attributed to a troubled neighbourhood.<sup>1</sup> Surrounded by failed as well as ill governed states, India has been subjected to a range of security challenges from both state as well as state sponsored non-state actors. The country has been plagued by a multiplicity of internal security challenges in the form of terrorism and insurgency movements, pacifying which takes much of its effort and resources. Externally, unsettled borders, disputed territories, and old treaties that have never been adhered to in spirit create enormous problems for bilateral relations.

However, from a decision-making point of view, the challenges are linked to systemic conditions, capacities of institutions, legislations, personalities, policies, politics, the art of bargaining, and economic strength. A perfect harmony, based on shared interest or hard bargaining is necessary on most occasions among the actors to arrive at agreeable and implementable, if not consensual, decisions.

The broad objective of this monograph is not to produce an investigative report into the dynamics of the decision-making apparatus, much less a narrative based on confidential information. No attempt has been made to compile classified inputs regarding the decision-making processes in the identified case studies. However, the strength of the

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<sup>1</sup> Author's Interview with Cmde C. Uday Bhaskar, Strategic Analyst and former Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi, 13 March 2012.

monograph lies in its attempt to establish linkages among available open source information to construct a sequence of events, with the systemic and domestic factors in the backdrop. Interviews have been used not only to verify the available information, but also to gain insights on the missing links. Maximum attempt has been made to understand the decisions in light of the power plays and process of bargaining among the actors involved.

While the monograph provides a historical context to national security decision-making in discussing each of the case studies, it limits itself to analysing and largely examining the contemporary trends. In sum, it attempts to produce a present-day literature, relevant to policy making as well as understanding the complexities of decision making in India.

The monograph argues that the national security decision-making process in India is a complex phenomenon, which over the years has become even more complex, both by the wide scale transformations in systemic and domestic conditions and the addition of new actors into the apparatus. The busy and competing turf that the apparatus now resembles is ill prepared to synthesise and harmonise the interests of the multiplicity of actors. In the absence of a national doctrine of national security and supporting structures to assimilate contending views, national security decisions have been mostly reactive and ad hoc. This has led to the evolution of a curious scenario which strengthens personalities and benefits particular actors when decisions produce success, but weakens the decision-making apparatus when they fail. The monograph argues that since little attempt has been made to address the flaws, the future will provide no respite to the already hackneyed decision-making apparatus, with serious ramifications for India's national security.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

All the chapters in this monograph conform to a contemporary analytical approach, in organising the substantive cases. It deals with four case studies: two in the internal security sphere and two in the external security sphere. India's security policy decision-making towards Afghanistan and China are analysed for the external case studies and the effort towards

erecting a national counter terrorism architecture and policy towards the threat of left-wing extremism are included as case studies in the internal security decision-making sphere. Each of these four case studies, in turn, are analyses of three critical decisions taken during recent times. The objective is to produce the full range of influences, power plays and bargaining processes that culminate in particular decisions.

The monograph uses ‘national security’ in a broad sense of the term, beyond the narrow realist idea of security that concerns steps taken to mitigate actual or perceived violence and military threat from adversaries. Rather, it embraces concepts such as developmental policies as well as the use of business and trade as instruments of establishing order and minimising the possibilities of friction. This explains the rationale behind examining the trade and economic linkages in the context of India’s relations with China and Afghanistan. The broadening of the term further helps to analyse the role and influence of the business sector, which this monograph argues, is emerging as a new actor in the decision-making process.

The methodology used in the monograph involves examining published work, both primary and secondary sources, and also a field research study. The primary source for the study includes official documents, policy guidelines, in house papers produced by different ministries and departments. Some of these are available on the web and some were collected during field research in New Delhi. Secondary sources involved published work in the form of books, journal articles and newspaper opinion pieces and news items available in print as well as online. Indian government databases and websites have been accessed to analyse official policies regarding internal as well as external security issues. The third part of the methodology involved field research study in New Delhi—visiting libraries, universities and conducting in depth interviews with experts, media personnel, retired and serving government officials. Interviewed persons have been cited with their permission and have been left un-cited where they declined to be quoted.

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# LITERATURE SURVEY

The literature on national security decision-making in India is sparse. While a number of scholars have dealt in detail with India's foreign policy making, writings focusing exclusively on the country's security policy decision-making are limited. It is this research gap that this monograph attempts to bridge.

Writings on foreign and security policy decision-making in India can be broadly divided into two categories. Authors belonging to the first category are critics of the decision-making process. They point at various deficiencies that mark the process. These deficiencies range from lack of capacity and lack of vision to wrong prioritisation of responsibilities on the part of the government. The second group of authors try to understand the decision-making process by highlighting critical factors that shape the policy. Successes or failures in foreign and security policy making are broadly attributed by both sets of authors to personalities, domestic or systemic factors. In recent times, however, scholars have started looking at the micro level focusing on the role and influence of bureaucracy, media, civil society, strategists and the business sector on foreign and security policy making.

## THE CRITICS

Daniel Markey in a 2009 essay<sup>1</sup> outlined significant shortcomings in India's foreign policy institutions that undermine the country's capacity

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1 Daniel Markey, "Developing India's Foreign Policy 'Software'", The National Bureau of Asian Research, Asia Policy, No. 8, July 2009, pp. 73–96, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=105157>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.

for ambitious and effective international action. He pointed out four main reasons why India's own foreign policy establishment hinders the country from achieving great-power status. The reasons ranged from a small sized Indian Foreign Service to the insufficient access Indian think tanks have to "the information or resources required to conduct high-quality, policy-relevant scholarship". In addition, Markey pointed out that India's universities are poorly funded, highly regulated, and fail to provide world-class education in the social sciences and other fields related to foreign policy. Moreover, India's media and private firms are also not built to undertake sustained foreign policy research or training. Markey's views found significant support among commentators on India's foreign policy making.

Writing three years after Markey, India's former Minister of State for External Affairs, Shashi Tharoor takes a slightly different position while commenting on the Indian diplomatic corps. He credits them for being "among the world's best in individual talent and ability" with "exceptional intellectual and personal distinction who have acquired formidable reputations in a variety of countries". However, he laments that India's diplomacy is affected by "institutional failings which are evident despite the quality of the individuals who operate within them".<sup>2</sup> For Tharoor, the institutional failings comprise of a drastic shortfall in strength of the corps, their selection method, the new breed of men and women who join the services with a distinct lack of appetite required to excel in the services, the paltry resources available for the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), among other factors. Tharoor concludes by saying that "there is a mountain to be climbed before the India Foreign Service (IFS) and the MEA become more effective instruments of India's global interests in a globalising world".<sup>3</sup>

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2 Sashi Tharoor, "In the Ministry of Eternal Affairs", July 2012, <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/PrintThisStory.aspx?StoryId=1469>. Accessed on 5 July 2012. This article is an adaptation of Tharoor's forthcoming book *Pax Indica: India and the World of the Twenty-first Century*, scheduled to be released in July 2012.

3 Ibid.

Similarly, *Nonalignment 2.0*,<sup>4</sup> a policy document written by former officials, scholars and analysts, which was released in early 2012, points out India's institutional limits in coping with a host of new challenges and demands which it confronts as it steps out into the global order. The document states that faced with the proliferation of global institutions in a host of issue areas India's capabilities are seriously lagging behind its commitments.

In the domestic sphere, a number of security experts have pointed to both structural flaws and a gross lack of vision in the country's security policy making. Ajai Sahni argues that Indian state's "responses to existing and emerging challenges of internal security have been marked by a high measure of incoherence, structural infirmities, and a growing crisis of capacities". Although the country has "extraordinary experience in defeating some of the most virulent insurgent and terrorist movements", such lessons "have not been transferred efficiently to other theatres".<sup>5</sup> Toeing a similar line, Paul Staniland indicates that India "suffers from a fragmented and inefficient bureaucracy, far fewer resources than developed countries even though it faces a higher threat level, and a political elite focused primarily on electoral politics".<sup>6</sup> Voicing a similar opinion, Christine Fair concludes that India's efforts at internal security reform, initiated after the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, would be difficult to achieve given the "centre—state relations; the challenges of India's democracy; the enduring system of patronage that undergirds federal and state politics; and corruption across the administrative service, political parties and

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4 Sunil Khilnani et al., *Nonalignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century*, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, February, 2012, [http://www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/NonAlignment%202.0\\_1.pdf](http://www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/NonAlignment%202.0_1.pdf).

5 C. Raja Mohan and Ajai Sahni, *India's Security Challenges at Home and Abroad*, National Bureau of Asian Research, Special Report 39, May 2012, p. 2.

6 Paul Staniland, "Improving India's Counterterrorism Policy after Mumbai", *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 11–14, [http://belfercenter.hks.harvard.edu/publication/18979/improving\\_indias\\_counterterrorism\\_policy\\_after\\_mumbai.html](http://belfercenter.hks.harvard.edu/publication/18979/improving_indias_counterterrorism_policy_after_mumbai.html). Accessed on 23 June 2012.

critically, the police forces".<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Sandy Gordon comments that "India's internal security architecture has evolved in an ad hoc way" and is "plagued by 'turfdom', fragmentation and careerism".<sup>8</sup>

## PULLS AND PRESSURES IN EXTERNAL SECURITY POLICY MAKING

### Hold of bureaucracy

That a largely ineffectual bureaucracy has a vice like grip over security and foreign policy making has been a common refrain among many of the commentators.<sup>9</sup> In this context, Daniel Markey's view of an inadequately equipped Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) that not only depends only on its own wisdom for policy making, but also resists outside influence, finds resonance among several authors. In the context of India's relationship with the United States, C. Raja Mohan has rued that not only does India's permanent bureaucracy dominate foreign policy making, but it is adapting too slowly to the new imperatives of a stronger partnership with Washington.<sup>10</sup> Sumit Ganguly maintains that the Indian political leadership "proved far more adept at coming to terms with the changed international order than those charged with implementing its directives". He contends, "Certain habits of mind, deeply ingrained in the organisational culture of the Indian foreign policy bureaucracy, could not be easily discarded. The members of this entrenched bureaucracy had a difficult time accepting the changes that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union, and they accommodated themselves fitfully and with great reluctance to a new political dispensation at home and abroad. They were extremely sceptical about making overtures to the United States

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7 Christine Fair, "Prospects for effective internal security reforms in India", *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 2, April 2012, pp. 145 –170.

8 Sandy Gordon, "India's Unfinished Security Revolution", IDSA Occasional Paper No. 11, August 2010, [http://www.idsain.org/system/files/OP10\\_IndiasUnfinishedSecurityRevolution\\_0.pdf](http://www.idsain.org/system/files/OP10_IndiasUnfinishedSecurityRevolution_0.pdf). Accessed on 23 June 2012.

9 Author's interview with Cmde C. Uday Bhaskar.

10 C. Raja Mohan, "India's Strategic Future", *Foreign Policy*, 4 November 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/04/indias\\_strategic\\_future?hidecomments=yes](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/04/indias_strategic_future?hidecomments=yes). Accessed on 4 July 2012.

and harboured fond hopes of a renewed and robust relationship with Russia.<sup>11</sup> Jabin Jacob, argues that India's China policy "in recent years has been driven more by bureaucratic expertise and military demands than by political vision". As a result, such "a foreign policy risks either missing opportunities provided by the global situation or diverting and wasting limited national resources".<sup>12</sup>

### Influence of domestic policy

Domestic political concerns have shaped India's foreign policy in the neighbourhood and also beyond. India's relations with the Arab world factors in the 'sensitivity' of the Muslim population at home. For decades, the Tamil population in the country has continued to dictate the policy on Sri Lanka. In India-Pakistan relations, domestic politics poses major obstacles to finding a lasting resolution. In recent times, individual political leaders like West Bengal Chief Minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee have either significantly influenced or played a spoiler role in India's policy towards Bangladesh.

Whether it is a constraint of coalition politics that India has experienced for the past several years, or genuine respect for the federal principles, the role of the states sharing international boundaries in framing foreign and security policies has been duly acknowledged in the official circles. In the words of former foreign secretary Nirupama Rao, "Our relations with immediate neighbours in South Asia also have a clear domestic dimension. For example, our relations with Myanmar need to take into account the presence of tribal groups across our borders that can influence developments and impact on security in our bordering

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11 Sumit Ganguly, "India's Foreign Policy Grows up", *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Winter 2003–04, <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/articles/wpj03-4/ganguly.html>. Accessed on 24 June 2012.

12 Jabin T. Jacob, "India's China Policy: Time to Overcome Political Drift", Policy Paper, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, June 2012, [http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/policy\\_papers/Time%20to%20Overcome%20Political%20Drift.pdf](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/policy_papers/Time%20to%20Overcome%20Political%20Drift.pdf). Accessed on 4 July 2012.

states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. At the same time, these links could also be a powerful binder.”<sup>13</sup>

However, while concerns for the domestic population is an unavoidable factor in the foreign and security policy decision-making, for decades such policies have remained prisoners to the ups and downs of domestic politics, mostly with negative ramifications. A host of authors attribute a significant influence of the domestic factors on India’s foreign and security policy, especially the policy India pursues in its neighbourhood. For example, Nitin Pai argues, “The single most important factor that determines whether and how India intervenes in a neighbouring country is domestic politics. With increasing proximity, the number of domestic stakeholders and the size of their stakes both increase.” He adds that “India’s federal structure and the contemporary reality of coalition governments ensures that decisions are not outcomes of a rational calculation by the Indian government, but political resultants of the interplay of stakeholders’ interests”.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, Vipin Narang and Paul Staniland argue that in spite of the heterogeneity across individuals and over time, a strategic “core” has nevertheless emerged and endured that broadly shapes India’s approach to world affairs. “This strategic worldview emphasises autonomy, flexibility, and a desire to avoid dependence on stronger powers.”<sup>15</sup>

### ***Responding to systemic transformations***

India’s great power ambitions have come for close scrutiny from a range

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13 Nirupama Rao, “Cooperation Or Conflict?”, Keynote Address at IDSA Conference on “South Asia 2020: Moving towards Cooperation or Conflict?”, 4 November 2009, New Delhi, *Outlook*, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262700>. Accessed on 24 June 2012.

14 Nitin Pai, “The Paradox of Proximity: India’s Approach to Fragility in the Neighbourhood”, Centre for International Cooperation, New York University, April 2011, <http://takshashila.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/nitinpai-nyu-paradoxofproximity.pdf>. Accessed on 23 May 2012.

15 Vipin Narang & Paul Staniland, “Institutions and Worldviews in Indian Foreign Security Policy”, *India Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2012, pp. 76–94.

of authors. David Malone points at several loopholes. India's international policy is still mostly reactive, incremental and without any grand vision, its few diplomats are good, but terribly overstretched, it is coy to the point of feebleness in promoting its values abroad and its huge armed forces trouble no military planners outside of South Asia.<sup>16</sup> However, this critic has found some resonance from Indian strategists, who point not so much at the cultural and strategic hollowness that temper India's vision, but the new realities to which India must adapt to achieve its objectives.

In the context of China, C. Raja Mohan argues that India, "which began its quest for a multi-polar world amid fears of American hegemony after the Cold War, is now faced with the prospect of a uni-polar Asia that is dominated by China". India's strategy of engagement with all other great powers without having to choose between them is no longer sustainable. In this backdrop, "the compulsions for looking beyond nonalignment do not stem from a prior recasting of India's foreign policy principles but rather from adapting to the regional consequences of China's rise for India's extended neighbourhood and to a range of global issues".<sup>17</sup>

### Unprofessional strategists

Critics pointing at a lack of strategic culture in India, point at the dearth of thinkers and analysts who could shape the country's vision. This has indeed been a bane of India's growth as a knowledge super power. However, in explaining the phenomenon India's current National Security Advisor argues that the lack of strategic focus in India's foreign and security policy is due to the "relative inexperience of the newly-developed class of professional strategists, an immaturity which he believes will be rectified with time. He notes that the same unsophisticated analysis was present in 1950s American debates on strategic issues and nuclear weapons, because it was the first time the strategists had had to face these

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16 David M. Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance? Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

17 C. Raja Mohan and Ajai Sahni, *India's Security Challenges at Home and Abroad*, op. cit.

kinds of issues, and that this proved to be self-correcting. In his opinion, it has only been in the last ten years in India that strategists have started thinking in terms of ‘outcomes’, not only in regard to foreign policy, but also in domestic issues.”<sup>18</sup>

### The business sector

On a more positive note, however, the efforts of Indian diplomats are being actively augmented by the Indian private sector, which in recent years has demonstrated a considerable penchant for playing a diplomatic role. The major business associations, particularly the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), have been significant players at events such as the World Economic Forum in Davos. They have also conducted what they call “strategic dialogues” between titans of Indian industry and influential opinion makers in countries like the United States, Japan and Singapore, and organised important trade delegations, such as a major group that made a breakthrough visit to Pakistan in 2012. The private sector has already convincingly demonstrated the capacity and the talent to serve as a force multiplier for Indian diplomacy, particularly in its public diplomacy efforts and in national image-building overseas.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the influence of the business sector, the role played by the Indian diaspora and even the media in foreign and security policy has also been studied by a handful of authors. For example, Ashok Malik indicates that foreign and security policy making in India is “driven by three new sources of pressure: an ambitious business community, a vocal diaspora and a rambunctious and aggressive news media”. These new realities necessitate, he argues, that “anyone who seeks to influence Indian strategic and foreign policy will have to understand and work

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18 Louise Merrington, “Big Dreams, Little Direction: India’s Foreign Policy Machine”, 4 August 2010, <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/blogs/southasiamasala/2010/08/04/big-dreams-little-direction-india%E2%80%99s-foreign-policy-machine/>. Accessed on 24 June 2012.

19 Sashi Tharoor, “In the Ministry of Eternal Affairs”, op. cit.

within this framework". Further, the "Indian policy establishment will need to adapt—for instance, through better coordinating or even merging its external affairs and commerce ministries"<sup>20</sup>

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20 Ashok Malik, "India's New World: Civil Society in the Making of Foreign Policy", May 2011, [http://lowyinstitute.cachefly.net/files/pubfiles/Malik\\_and\\_Medcalf,\\_India's\\_new\\_world\\_web.pdf](http://lowyinstitute.cachefly.net/files/pubfiles/Malik_and_Medcalf,_India's_new_world_web.pdf). Accessed on 12 June 2012.

## INDIA'S AFGHANISTAN POLICY

In the post-Taliban era, India's security policy in Afghanistan has revolved around three broad objectives: "security concerns, economic interests and regional aspirations".<sup>1</sup> India, which shares strong historical, socio-cultural, civilisational and economic ties with Afghanistan, has attempted to contribute to the stabilisation efforts in the country in order to prevent its slide into becoming a hotbed of insurgency and terrorism. This makes India a partner in the efforts of the international community to bring peace and stability to the country. On the other hand, this makes India vulnerable to the designs of the forces that focus on the destabilisation efforts. As a result, while India's efforts have won it many laurels and appreciation within Afghanistan, Indian interests, projects and nationals have also been targeted repeatedly by the Taliban and its sponsors.

The challenge Afghanistan poses to India's security policy decision-making is, therefore, unique. It divides the country's opinion into two clear camps: one who wants New Delhi to remain engaged in Afghanistan in spite of the threats and attacks and the other, who want it to follow the path of the international community who are on their way out of the country. Synthesising the concerns of these two contradictory, yet influential camps has not been easy. As a result, in spite of its decade-long engagement, India's security policy in Afghanistan continues to remain

1 Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "India, Afghanistan and the 'End Game'?", Working Paper No. 124, Institute of South Asian Studies, 11 March 2011, p. 2, [http://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/Attachments/PublisherAttachment/ISAS\\_Working\\_Paper\\_124\\_-\\_Email\\_-\\_India,\\_Afghanistan\\_and\\_the\\_-'End\\_Game'\\_23032011185007.pdf](http://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/Attachments/PublisherAttachment/ISAS_Working_Paper_124_-_Email_-_India,_Afghanistan_and_the_-'End_Game'_23032011185007.pdf). Accessed on 24 June 2012.

in a state of flux, adapting to new realities on the ground and learning from the mistakes of the past.

This chapter is an attempt to understand India's security policy decision-making in Afghanistan. Far from being a narrative on India's engagement in the political and security developments in the war torn country, the chapter takes a closer look at the actors and enablers in the policy making process in India to judge their influence on the actual decision making. It looks at the systemic issues that affect policy making, the contradictory domestic viewpoints that divide the country's thinking on Afghanistan and analyses the extent to which such thinking has influenced the policy making.

For the sake of narrowing down the analysis into focussed areas, the chapter takes up three case studies to analyse the nuances of New Delhi's decision making in Afghanistan. First, it looks at the dilemma of pursuing a development versus military involvement, a dilemma that continues to haunt Indian policy making. Secondly, the chapter examines India's position on the Afghan reconciliation, more precisely on the issue of talking to the Taliban, and thirdly, it analyses India's strategy on Afghan transition, i.e. the prospect of Afghanisation of the country's security sector after 2014.

## DECISION MAKING: ACTORS

### Principal actors

In the normal course, foreign policy making is the predominant responsibility of the MEA. The Ministry's Pakistan Afghanistan Iran (PAI) division headed by a joint secretary assists the Foreign Secretary who in turn advises the Foreign Minister in this regard. However, in the context of Afghanistan's criticality to India's security concerns, MEA's efforts are supplemented by a whole range of ministries, departments and actors. The Prime Minister's Office retains a direct role on Afghanistan. Apart from the National Security Advisor (NSA), whose office has come to be involved in foreign and security policy making in a significant way, a special envoy of the Prime Minister has been appointed for Pakistan and Afghanistan. The NSA too advises the Prime Minister and in turn is

advised by the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) on relevant issues. Further, both the NSA and the special envoy maintain a steady and independent line of communication with the Indian embassy in Kabul.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), which deploys over 200 personnel of the para-military Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) to guard the Indian missions in Afghanistan, too plays a critical role in framing the security policy. However, all critical policy decisions are cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by the Prime Minister and consisting of the External Affairs Minister, Defence Minister, Finance Minister, Home Minister and the NSA.

### **The enablers**

The Embassy of India in Afghanistan is the primary enabler for the MEA and the NSA to take decisions. The Ambassador, apart from liaising within the MEA, also has direct access to the NSA and the Prime Minister. Similarly, India's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) is instrumental in providing regular briefs related to the security situation in the country and forms the knowledge base for New Delhi with regard to its decision making. In addition to the Indian Ambassador in Afghanistan, former ambassadors, both retired and serving, too influence the decision-making process. However, this mostly remains a one-way process and is often done on the advice sought by the MEA and not vice versa.

In recent years, Indian business houses with economic interests in the infrastructure projects and also the mining sector in Afghanistan have started influencing government decisions. It can be argued that many of India's decisions to stay engaged in the country and expand its aid and reconstruction activities towards a trade and investment oriented policy has to do with the interest demonstrated by the business groups.

### **Peripheral actors**

Think tanks, the strategic community, analysts and media form the group of peripheral actors with regard to decision making on Afghanistan. It can be argued that the dependence of the MEA on the peripheral actors

is more nuanced and visible in the context of Afghanistan compared to many other regions of the world. Afghanistan's criticality to Indian security and the rather inadequate knowledge base of the MEA with regard to that country makes it relatively more open to receive wisdom from external un-official sources.

## DECISION MAKING: CASE STUDIES

### Military footprint versus a development approach

India returned to post-9/11 Afghanistan to restore and revive its relationship that was disrupted by the Taliban takeover of Kabul in 1996. The dilemma was, however, between becoming a part of the U.S.-led military offensive against the Taliban and pursuing low key development and reconstruction activities, a policy that came for much criticism from the international community as hiding behind the hard work of the countries who fought against the extremists. India, however, took the decision to concentrate its efforts on "development and reconstruction" activities in the war-ravaged country.

Since then, "India has played an active role in the development of Afghanistan based on the understanding that social and economic development is key to Afghanistan becoming a source of regional stability".<sup>2</sup> India's pledged assistance in four broad areas—infrastructure projects, humanitarian assistance, small and community-based development projects, and education and capacity development—to Afghanistan stands at US\$1.3 billion, which makes it the sixth largest bilateral donor in Afghanistan.

India's aid programmes and reconstruction activities have earned it tremendous goodwill among the Afghans. Its emphasis on capacity and institution building and directing most of its aid through the Afghan government, as opposed to the western model of aid delivery through the international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), has resulted

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2 *India-Afghanistan Relations*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, <http://meaindia.nic.in/meapsite/pressrelease/2011/01/bilateralafghanistan.pdf>. Accessed on 3 June 2012.

in widening of the reach of the central government in Kabul. "India has provided assistance to women's groups through self-employment generation schemes, health care and capacity-building programs. Such schemes, operational in Kabul and the western province of Herat, are popular among local women groups, making them long-term stakeholders in rebuilding the country's social and economic fabric."<sup>3</sup>

However, the decision not to participate in the military efforts remains a matter of continuing debate, spurred by each incident of attack carried out by the Taliban and its sponsors on Indian interests. Although the government since beginning have decided against a direct military participation, a stand which has received political support from its opposition parties, some pressure against such a decision has been generated mostly by the peripheral actors category.

Some of the experts have indeed called for a policy of putting "boots in the ground". For example, Gurmeet Kanwal calls for a strategy to retaliate and prevent such systematic targeting. He indicates that the deployment of the ITBP personnel forces providing protection to the Indian mission is insufficient. India's development and reconstruction activity in Afghanistan needs to be secured by a military presence. "I wouldn't use the expression flex its muscles. I would say the time has come to live up to our responsibility. If it involves military intervention, so be it," he says.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, following a suicide bombing in Kabul in October 2009, an expert opined, "If India wants the world to recognise it as a global power, then the time has come for India to step up to the plate and the first step in that direction is to respond to the latest attack in Kabul with greater military engagement to support its developmental and political presence in Afghanistan."<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, C. Raja Mohan called for capacity building among the Afghan security forces rather than sending Indian troops

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3 Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "India, Afghanistan and the 'End Game'?".

4 Author's interview with Gurmeet Kanwal, Director, CLAWS, New Delhi, 8 March 2012.

5 Harsh Pant, "India must Deploy Troops in Afghanistan", *Rediff*, 13 October 2009, <http://www.rediff.com/news/column/india-must-deploy-troops-in-afghanistan/20091013.htm> . Accessed on 23 June 2012.

to that country. "Instead of debating whether we should send troops to Afghanistan, Delhi should look at a range of other ways it can help Kabul and Washington make the Afghan National Army a credible and effective fighting force. The best contribution that India could make might be in the areas of combat training and creating capacities in logistics and communications. India could also perhaps help the Afghans in re-building their Air Force."<sup>6</sup>

New Delhi has opted to go for an indirect military involvement rather than a direct one. In November 2002 it deployed its para-military ITBP personnel to guard its Embassy in Kabul and four consulates. In July 2004, the ITBP strength was augmented to provide security to the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) personnel for their Delaram-Zaranj road construction project in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> The Home Ministry under whom the ITBP functions, has periodically reviewed the scale of deployment.<sup>8</sup> Till February 2010, 163 ITBP personnel were deployed at the Indian embassy in Kabul and its consulates in Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif. A media report in March 2010 indicated that the scale of deployment was augmented by 40 soldiers after the Indians came under a suicide attack from the insurgents in February 2010.<sup>9</sup>

However, the option of sending its troops to confront the insurgents has not found favour in the official circles. While the Indo-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2011 has provisions for training of Afghan security forces by the Indian military, the following considerations have prevented New Delhi's decision to keep away from a military

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6 C. Raja Mohan, "Debating India's Stand on Military Aid to Afghanistan", *Indian Express*, 7 July 2009.

7 Website of the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), <http://itbpolice.nic.in/itbpwebsite/mar.html>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.

8 "Centre Mulls more Afghan Security", *Telegraph*, 3 March 2010, [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100303/jsp/nation/story\\_12170530.jsp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100303/jsp/nation/story_12170530.jsp). Accessed on 23 June 2012.

9 "India to Rush 40 ITBP Commandos to Afghanistan", *Sify*, 12 March 2010, <http://www.sify.com/news/india-to-rush-40-itbp-commandos-to-afghanistan-news-national-kdmt4cfeajd.html>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.

presence in the war torn country. First, the Indian military does not bring any unique experience to the Afghan field and may receive setbacks there fuelling domestic public opinion. Second, any action resulting in collateral civilian deaths would wipe away the goodwill India's development projects have earned in that country and thirdly, an open participation in the U.S.-led war on the Taliban and Al Qaeda may backfire in making India the target of attacks by terrorists affiliated to the global terror network.

### Reconciliation process

To begin with India opposed any negotiations with the Taliban. While the memories of India closing its embassy in Kabul in the wake of the Taliban take over in 1996 and the unforgettable experience of the Taliban's non-cooperation during the hijacking of flight IC-814 to Kandahar in 1998 shaped the Indian outlook before the 9/11 period, repeated attacks carried out by the insurgents and their affiliates on Indian missions and interests in Afghanistan hardened such a position. Moreover, India's aversion was also influenced by its strategic consideration that "any dialogue with the Taliban that could give Pakistan greater leverage in the region or with Washington" was unwise.<sup>10</sup> From a policy point of view, India's view was straight jacketed, narrow and based on a belief that the Taliban are a monolithic organisation, with each of its leaders and members equally committed to an ideological campaign of violence and orthodoxy. To a large extent, this official position was influenced by a broad spectrum of peripheral actors' opinion, many of whom described the "re-integrable Taliban" as some sort of a fictional concoction.

This 'no-negotiation' position was reflected in the repeated statements of diplomats and politicians till much of 2009. For example, the then Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao said in November 2009, "Terrorism remains a central challenge to regional security. This was again

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10 Ahmed Rashid, "Why the U.S. must talk to the Taliban", *Washington Post*, 18 March 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/16/AR2010031603302.html>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.

underscored by the terrorist attack on our Mission in Kabul on 8 October 2009 as also previously by frequent terrorist incidents including the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. There is a real challenge posed by resurgence of the Taliban and Al Qaeda.”<sup>11</sup>

However, by the second half of 2009, the Indian position had started shifting to accepting the process of reintegration: the return of mid-level commanders and young foot soldiers to the Afghan mainstream and accepting the country’s constitution. It was a pragmatic shift based on both India’s broadened vision of the reconciliation process that distinguished between the hardcore Taliban leadership and the section who were open to a process of reintegration. Moreover, from a systemic point of view it was a solution that was imposed by the U.S. and the Karzai administration who were inclined to end the war by creating a division within the Taliban. The policy shift was reflected in a media interview by Foreign Minister S. M. Krishna in September 2009. He indicated that there is no military solution to the conflict in that country and that NATO combat operations should give way to a political settlement with the Taliban. “India doesn’t believe that war can solve any problem and that applies to Afghanistan also. I think there could be a political settlement. I think we should strive towards that.”<sup>12</sup>

This ‘new’ Indian position received a boost with the appointment of Shiv Shankar Menon as NSA in early 2010. Taking it beyond the mere acceptance of the reintegration process, Mr Menon appeared to have impressed upon the MEA and the PMO on the need to reach out to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e-Islami party, and also keeping its door open in case of a reconciliation effort by the Taliban. A media report threw light on the intricacies of this paradigm shift:

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- 11 Nirupama Rao, “Cooperation Or Conflict?”, Keynote Address at IDSA Conference on “South Asia 2020: Moving towards Cooperation or Conflict?”, 4 November 2009, New Delhi, *Outlook*, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262700>. Accessed on 24 June 2012.
- 12 “Indian Minister Urges Afghan Political Settlement”, *Wall Street Journal*, 23 September 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125364105273431343.html>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.

A “fine-tuning of India’s position on Afghanistan comes after exchange of views between top diplomats. After the February (2010) attack on Indians in Kabul, Vice-President Hamid Ansari, Pakistan-Afghanistan envoy Satinder Lambah and former West Asia envoy Chinmay Gharekhan wanted India to adopt a neutral position in Afghanistan. This month (March 2010), this view was nuanced further by the UPA [United Progressive Alliance] government, with New Delhi now all for an independent or neutral Afghanistan that does not require the crutches of neighbouring Pakistan. According to a paper prepared by the Ministry of External Affairs on the subject, India should back an Afghanistan that keeps out terrorism emanating from Pakistan and does not allow the state to slip back into the violence spiral of 1990s. The sub-text of the paper is that Afghanistan will come under the total influence of Pakistan if New Delhi were to let matters go out of hand. New Delhi wants to reach out to Pashtuns in the south and on the Durand Line while retaining ties with its Northern Alliance friends and President Karzai. So rather than the expected downscaling of Indian engagement in Afghanistan, New Delhi is all for enlarging it, lest it wants to let the republic be dominated by extremist forces of the past.”<sup>13</sup>

The position was further reiterated in an address to the joint session of the Afghan Parliament on 13 May 2011 by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He declared, “Afghanistan has embarked upon a process of national reconciliation. We wish you well in this enterprise. It is up to you, as the peoples’ representatives, to make decisions about your country’s future without outside interference or coercion. This is your sovereign right. India will respect the choices you make and the decisions you take.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, the only red herring India appeared to propose was that the reconciliation process should be “Afghan owned and Afghan led”.

An assurance from Afghanistan that the reconciliation process would

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13 Shishir Gupta, “India Shifts Afghan Policy, Ready to talk to Taliban”, *Indian Express*, 29 March 2010, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/india-shifts-afghan-policy-ready-to-talk-to-taliban/596851/0>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.

14 PM’s address at the Joint Session of the Parliament of Afghanistan, 13 May 2011, <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech-details.php?nodeid=1023>. Accessed on 23 June 2011.

be free from external pressure appeared to have further convinced New Delhi of the need to support the process. In July 2011, a 15-member delegation from Afghanistan led by Secretary of the Afghan Peace Council Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai paid a visit to New Delhi and held talks with the Foreign Minister S. M. Krishna. In a media interview, Stanekzai told, “The relation between the two countries is deep and we came here to have their (Indian) support to the efforts and also to give confidence that what we are going in the peace process, it is in the interest of the Afghan people. This is an Afghan led process and they should not have any doubt, this process will not be under the influence of anybody else.”<sup>15</sup>

### Role in the transition process

The international community’s decision of drawing down from Afghanistan expressed through U.S. President Barack Obama’s 2010 speech created an atmosphere of insecurity in Afghanistan and also in the regional sphere. The spectre of a Taliban return loomed large in a scenario when the Afghan national security forces have not been adequately prepared to withstand the insurgent onslaught. Predictably, this generated a significant debate in New Delhi. Queries were raised whether India too should follow the U.S. and NATO decision by downsizing its presence.

New Delhi’s dilemma has further been complicated by a dramatic shift in systemic conditions. On the one hand, U.S.-Pakistan relations have deteriorated, following the American special-forces operation that killed Al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden in May 2011. On the other hand, relations between India and Pakistan have improved a wee bit with both countries deciding to engage each other in discussing trade and bilateral relations. As the U.S. and NATO pull out of Afghanistan, Washington is urging India to play a more proactive role. In early June 2012, U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta during his visit to New Delhi described India as the “linchpin” in a new U.S. military strategy focused on Asia and urged “India’s leaders to continue with additional support to

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15 Suhasini Haidar, “Need India’s Help in Taliban talks: Afghanistan”, *CNN-IBN*, 16 July 2011, <http://news.taaza.com/source/587143-need-indias-help-in-taliban-talks-afghanistan.html>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.

Afghanistan through trade and investment, reconstruction, and help for Afghanistan's security forces".<sup>16</sup> This creates a dilemma for India. On the one hand, it wants to protect its strategic interests in Afghanistan and let its decade-old efforts not go waste. On the other, it does not wish to become the vehicle for the American objective in Afghanistan and spoil its links with the regional powers like Pakistan and Iran.

In the peripheral actors' sphere many experts warned India of a policy of upping its ante in Afghanistan. Other experts advised for a more proactive role. For them, the downsizing of U.S. presence in Afghanistan is an opportunity for India to increase its role in the war torn country. "It can either accept this opportunity and leverage the U.S. keenness to reshape India's regional and global role, or else remain marginal to the rapidly evolving strategic realities," says an expert.<sup>17</sup> Gurmeet Kanwal, for example, has stuck to his advocacy for Indian troop presence in the country. "While at present there is no support in India for sending troops to Afghanistan, there is realisation that the fight against the Taliban and the al-Qaeda has long term security implications for India. With some effort, New Delhi could be persuaded to deploy up to one division (15,000 troops) to join a UN peacekeeping force provided Pakistan's sensibilities about Indian military presence in Afghanistan can be taken care of," he writes.<sup>18</sup> Others, however, are not too convinced of the utility of a policy of becoming a pawn in the American game.

However, faced with this dilemma induced by a transformation in the systemic conditions, India appeared to choose the middle path—of increasing its role to protect Afghanistan's stability and yet staying clear

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16 "Leon Panetta in Delhi, says India 'linchpin' for American Strategy in Asia", *Times of India*, 6 June 2012, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Leon-Panetta-in-Delhi-says-India-linchpin-for-American-strategy-in-Asia/articleshow/13871933.cms?> Accessed on 23 June 2012.

17 Harsh Pant, "Filling the Gaps in Afghanistan", *Business Standard*, 16 June 2012, <http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/bharsh-v-pantb-fillinggaps-in-afghanistan/477440/>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.

18 Gurmeet Kanwal, "Stabilising Afghanistan: Role of Key Regional Players", IDSA Comment, 2 July 2012, [http://idsa.in/idsacomments/StabilisingAfghanistan\\_gkanwal\\_020712](http://idsa.in/idsacomments/StabilisingAfghanistan_gkanwal_020712). Accessed on 4 July 2012.

from a direct military presence. With little domestic pressure on either of its policies, the decision appeared to have been purely a politico-strategic one, arrived through a detailed brainstorming involving the primary actors.

The product of the brainstorming was the India-Afghan strategic partnership agreement (SPA)—the blueprint for future cooperation between the two countries—signed on 4 October 2011. The SPA promised a deepening of bilateral relations in politics, security, trade and economics. The agreement, which covers Indian assistance in Afghanistan's capacity development and education, signals India's intent to stay engaged in the reconstruction of Afghanistan despite the challenges it faces from several quarters.<sup>19</sup> Under the SPA, India is to also assist in the training, equipping and capacity building programmes for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Both countries will hold regular strategic dialogues to intensify “mutual efforts towards strengthening regional peace and security”.

In May 2012, during the inaugural session of the India-Afghanistan Partnership Council meeting in New Delhi, India initiated discussions to not only train, but also equip Afghan security forces. Foreign Minister S. M. Krishna said that New Delhi views Afghanistan as a part of its extended neighbourhood and its interest in that country is neither “transitory” nor in “transition”.<sup>20</sup>

While much of this strategic reorientation is a continuation of the MEA's policy of engagement in Afghanistan, the business houses in India appeared to have contributed to the development of a new Indian approach. Since the beginning of 2011, New Delhi has attempted to shift from its predominantly development assistance role to becoming

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- 19 Bibhu Prasad Routray, “Indo-Afghan Strategic Treaty: Implications for Pakistan”, RSIS Commentary No. 148, 14 October 2011, <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS1482011.pdf>. Accessed on 24 June 2012.
- 20 *Transcript of the Joint Media Interaction of External Affairs Minister and Foreign Minister of Afghanistan*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, <http://www.meaindia.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530319273>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.

a country that aims to use Afghanistan's resource potential to build its economic viability, sustainability and independence.<sup>21</sup> While much of this shift has been influenced by the business houses in India who view Afghanistan as an attractive investment destination, the strategy shift is also in line with the official thinking that

Afghanistan's underdeveloped yet significant agricultural and human resource potential, and its strategic geographical location at the cross-roads of Central, South and West Asia and Eurasia, offer vast opportunities for foreign investment, trade and transit connectivity. Such potential can be harnessed by an assimilation of the economic interests of regional countries through a mutually beneficial inter-dependent framework. The convergence of such interests could be the best leverage against slide of Afghanistan into instability.<sup>22</sup>

Much of the policy is invariably linked to the following development. In November 2011, a seven-member consortium of Indian companies led by Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) bagged the rights to mine iron ore at Hajigak in Afghanistan, estimated to hold more than 1.8 billion tonnes of iron ore, enough to feed a 6-million tonne steel plant for four decades.<sup>23</sup> In April 2012, the Indian Minister for Steel visited Kabul to sign the memorandum of understanding and initiate the project.

On 28 June, the CII organised an investment meet in New Delhi to attract investments for Afghanistan and ensure that the country's economic and transit potential becomes its inherent strength to accrue the

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21 Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "Delhi Investment Summit: Building On The Narrative Of 'Opportunity' In Afghanistan", *Eurasia Review*, 27 June 2012, <http://www.eurasiareview.com/27062012-delhi-investment-summit-building-on-the-narrative-of-opportunity-in-afghanistan-analysis/>. Accessed on 29 June 2012.

22 Ibid.

23 "SAIL-led Consortium AFISCO Bags Ore Mining Rights in Hajigak, Afghanistan", *Economic Times*, 29 November 2011, [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-11-29/news/30454344\\_1\\_hajigak-aynak-copper-mines-iron-ore](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-11-29/news/30454344_1_hajigak-aynak-copper-mines-iron-ore). Accessed on 23 June 2012.

much-needed economic dividends for itself and the region. The meet was a success considering the attendance it secured from many countries including Pakistan and China.

Evolving a regional solution to the Afghan imbroglio has also been another formula on which the MEA has worked in the past years. Considering the interests and leverage countries like Russia and Iran have in Afghanistan, the MEA has held regular dialogues with these countries. For example, in August 2010, a delegation led by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali Fathollahi and senior Indian Foreign Office officials explored the possibility of a trilateral meeting between India, Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>24</sup> In the same month, during the visit of the then foreign secretary Nirupama Rao to Moscow, both countries “agreed to coordinate policies more closely on Afghanistan”.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike New Delhi’s other efforts in Afghanistan, the strategy of a regional solution has remained the least controversial and has received support from the strategic community, from India and abroad. The MEA also appears to have come round to accept the criticality of Pakistan being involved in a regional solution. However, the lack of unanimity among the regional countries regarding an end goal in Afghanistan and more specifically opposition from Pakistan continues to block any progress in this direction. The two stated goals in the approach: “to commit to non-interference/neutralit y on Afghanistan and to set up a mechanism of senior officials to monitor it” has faced opposition from Pakistan, which cites “national security”<sup>26</sup>.

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- 24 Sandeep Dikshit, “India, Iran discuss ‘regional solution’ in Afghanistan”, *The Hindu*, 7 August 2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article5559055.html>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.
- 25 Vladimir Radyuhin, “India, Russia to Step up Cooperation in Afghanistan”, *The Hindu*, 3 August 2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article5499345.html>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.
- 26 Indrani Bagchi, “Pakistan Opposed to Regional Solution on Afghanistan”, *Times of India*, 30 October 2011, [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-10-30/india/30338835\\_1\\_pakistani-army-cooperation-organization-regional-solution.html](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-10-30/india/30338835_1_pakistani-army-cooperation-organization-regional-solution.html). Accessed on 4 July 2012.

To sum up, India's approach towards the Afghan transition has remained a combination of official thinking and initiatives by the business community. As the country explores different approaches to stay engaged in Afghanistan, the MEA has demonstrated willingness to accommodate not just the role played by the other actors, but also the views expressed by the strategic community.

## INDIA'S CHINA POLICY

**A**rguably, China poses the most complicated challenge to India's national security decision-making. Over decades, Chinese postures, if not policies, have had a deep impact on the domestic security concerns in India. Fears of a repeat of the 1962 aggression, Chinese assistance to Indian rebel groups, support to Pakistan on the Kashmir dispute and recurrent meddling in what India considers to be its own sovereign territory keeps New Delhi perennially occupied in a response framing mode. Moreover, in the external sphere, as the profiles of both India and China rise as regional as well as global powers, India feels the necessity to do a balancing act to deal with the radiation of Chinese power. "In the past, India balanced Beijing through a de facto alliance with the Soviet Union. Today, it needs a strategic partnership with the United States to ensure that China's rise will continue to be peaceful."<sup>1</sup>

However, amid the United States' (U.S.) dithering on formulating a concrete policy and the divided Indian thinking on whether to dovetail on an American policy to engage China, Indian policy has followed "a nuanced bilateral economic and political engagement with China, albeit with eyes wide open".<sup>2</sup> It has neither convinced many within the country nor is it considered to be a final policy on China. However, in recent years the Indian security policy has remained a cocktail of assertiveness as well as a self imposed limitation on not crossing the red line.

This chapter examines the decision-making process in India's

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1 C. Raja Mohan, "India's Strategic Future", *Foreign Policy*, 4 November 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/04/indias\\_strategic\\_future?hidecomments=yes](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/04/indias_strategic_future?hidecomments=yes). Accessed on 4 July 2012.

2 Ibid.

security policy towards China. This is done by analysing the strategic thinking in the country both in the official as well as non-governmental spheres, and the process of bargaining and power play among different actors in the decision-making process around three contentious issues: (i) the Indian position on the One-China policy, (ii) the border dispute along the Eastern Sector and (iii) politics of trade. The selection of these issues is directed at demonstrating the full range of influences and thinking that shape the Indian response to the Chinese actions. I argue that while the Indian response in the first case study represents a shift from a Nehruvian policy to a more pragmatic one, courtesy the opinions and pressures imposed by the strategic community, the second case offers an instance the role played by the domestic constituency and the defence establishment in the decision-making process. The decision-making process in the third case study portrays a predominance of the business sector and the neo-liberals.

## DECISION MAKING: ACTORS

### Principal actors

The MEA's China desk headed by the Joint Secretary (East Asia) is one of the two pillars of foreign policy decision-making on these issues. The other pillar is headed by the NSA. Two of the three NSAs India has had since the creation of the post in 1998 have been career diplomats. The first NSA, Brajesh Mishra served as ambassador to China as well. The level of competence in foreign policy making within the bureaucracy remains a matter of debate. On one level, an indicator of China's importance in India's foreign and security decision-making is the large number of diplomats with knowledge of Mandarin. According to the 2011–12 annual report of the MEA, as many as 62 officers are fluent in Mandarin, the fifth highest (after Arabic, Russian, French and Spanish) for any single language in the 506-strong contingent of serving diplomats the country has. However, at the other level, the short staff strength in the MEA deters effective policy formulation. India's former Minister of State for External Affairs, Sashi Tharoor writes,

The joint secretary in charge of East Asia has to handle India's policies

regarding China, Japan, the two Koreas, Mongolia, Taiwan, Tibetan refugees and the disputed frontier with China, in addition to unexpected crises like those relating to India's response to the Japanese earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. Inevitably, China consumes most of his attention and relations with the other crucial countries within his bailiwick are neglected or assigned to one of the five junior officials working under him.<sup>3</sup>

While the state governments earlier had little say in foreign and national security policy decision-making, of late they have been quite vocal in asserting their view point. In the context of India's policy towards China, states like Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, who share international borders with that country, have been vociferous on the issues to be incorporated into the country's policies. And experts agree that these have an impact on actual policy making.<sup>4</sup>

In the past decade, with the rise in India's economic prowess, the private sector too has become a critical power centre in the decision-making process. The voice of this community has risen along with the rise in Sino-Indian trade. Riding on a wave of increased trade activity, significant outsourcing by Indian companies to Chinese subsidiaries, large scale purchases of accessories by Indian power and telecom companies from China, the business houses have developed a large stake in a favourable trade policy with China.

## The enablers

The National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) acts as the primary enabler for the decision-making process. Similar has been the role of the Ministry of Defence, which is restricted to play only an enabler in the overall policy towards China. Given the unfavourable balance the Armed Forces enjoy in India's civil-military relations, their contribution to the decision-making process has also been marginal, and certainly

3 Sashi Tharoor, *Pax Indica: India and the World of the Twenty-first Century*, New Delhi: Penguin, Allen Lane, 2012), pp. 319–20.

4 Author's interview with Sujit Dutta, Professor, Nelson Mandela Centre of Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi, 9 March 2012.

not beyond the role of enablers.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Commerce Ministry too plays the role of an enabler. Intelligence inputs provided by a host of intelligence agencies and the RAW, India's external intelligence agency, shape security policy decision-making.

### Peripheral actors

China has come to acquire a sizeable intellectual attention from the Indian strategic community. In addition to the China specific academic and policy oriented work that the existing think tanks and universities produce, several think tanks with exclusive China focus have been set up in recent years. Many Indian universities have international relations departments focusing on China. This boom in China studies is taking care of the dearth of scholars on China, a visible trend in the 1980s and 1990s. Arguably, the lack of bureaucratic capacity has made the peripheral actors much more influential on the national security decision-making stage with regard to China compared to other theatres.

## DECISION MAKING: CASE STUDIES

### Revisiting the One China policy?

Whether India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was the one who recognised Tibet as an integral part of China is debatable. A note Nehru wrote on 18 June 1954, eleven days before the two countries signed the India-China (Panchsheel) Agreement on Tibet on 29 April 1954, spoke of a pragmatic and not a permanent Indian position on Tibet. "If we come to an agreement with China in regard to Tibet, that is not a permanent guarantee, but that itself is one major step to help us in the present and in the foreseeable future in various ways."<sup>6</sup> In any event, since the Dalai Lama first fled China in 1959 to India after a failed Tibetan uprising, India has maintained a nuanced position. "The Indian government, while

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5 Ibid.

6 A. G. Noorani, "Nehru's China policy", *Frontline*, Vol. 17, No. 15, 22 July – 4 August 2000, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/f1715/17150780.htm>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.

sympathetic to the case of the Dalai Lama, contends that Tibet legally is a part of China.<sup>7</sup> India is host to thousands of Tibetans, has granted them right to work, health care and education in India, has protected them from repatriation, plays host to the Central Tibetan Administration based in Dharamshala, which is considered by Tibetans to be a fully fledged government, and have extended a preferred status to the Tibetans compared to other foreigners. However, at the same time, India has maintained and reiterated the stand that Tibet is an inalienable part of China. For example, during the 2006 meeting of the heads of state, a joint statement proclaimed,

The Indian side recalls that India was among the first countries to recognize that there is one China and that its one China policy has remained unaltered. The Indian side states that it would continue to abide by its one China policy. The Chinese side expresses its appreciation for the Indian position. The Indian side reiterates that it has recognized the Tibet Autonomous Region as part of the territory of the People's Republic of China, and that it does not allow Tibetans to engage in anti-China political activities in India. The Chinese side expresses its appreciation for the Indian position.<sup>8</sup>

A similar trend continued in January 2008, during the visit of Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh to Beijing. A joint document called 'A Shared Vision for the 21st Century' issued during the occasion stated,

The Indian side recalls that India was among the first countries to recognize that there is one China and that its one China policy has

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7 Robert Trumbull, "Indians Dispute the Dalai Lama", *New York Times*, 9 September 1959, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=F10D1EF8355B107B93CA91782D85F4D8585F9>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.

8 *Joint Declaration by the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China*, Press Information Bureau, 21 November 2006, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=22168>. Accessed on 4 July 2012. See also Heather Timmons and Malavika Vyawahare, "Between Tibet and China, India Plays Delicate Balancing Act", *New York Times*, 3 April 2012, <http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/between-tibet-and-china-india-plays-delicate-balancing-act>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.

remained unaltered. The Indian side states that it would continue to abide by its one China policy, and oppose any activity that is against the one China principle. The Chinese side expresses its appreciation for the Indian position.<sup>9</sup>

In the subsequent years, India has taken steps to take care of Chinese sensitivities and has cracked down on Tibetans trying to organise protests against China on Indian soil. In March 2008, about 100 Tibetan monks and nuns, attempted a march from Dharamsala to the Tibetan capital of Lhasa to protest China's hosting of the Olympics. The march was quickly quashed, a restraining order was issued against the marchers and some of them were arrested. New Delhi's position has enjoyed support of the leftist political parties including the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M). In March 2008, the Communist Party of India (CPI) supported the Chinese foreign ministry's summoning of the then Indian ambassador to Beijing Nirupama Rao to protest against some Tibetans scaling the wall of its embassy in New Delhi. The CPI-M General Secretary Prakash Karat said there was "no abstract right for self determination for any minority groups".<sup>10</sup>

However, over the years, a sense of unease has grown both among the strategic community and the official circles about the rationale of such a "submissive policy".<sup>11</sup> That India should derecognise Tibet as a integral part of China has not only been raised by a section within the strategic community, but also by the right wing political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP has not only maintained that the recognition accorded by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Tibet as a Chinese territory was a mistake, but has demanded from

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- 9 Pranab Dhal Samanta, "No Mention of 'One China' is New Delhi Reply to Beijing for its Silence on J&K", *Indian Express*, 17 December 2010, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/no-mention-of-one-china-is-new-delhi-reply-to-beijing-for-its-silence-on-j&k/725951/2>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.
- 10 Kay Benedict, "CPI(M) goes Hammer & Sickle on Tibet", *Daily News & Analysis*, 1 April 2008, [http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report\\_cpim-goes-hammer-and-sickle-on-tibet\\_1158171](http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_cpim-goes-hammer-and-sickle-on-tibet_1158171). Accessed on 4 July 2012.
- 11 Author's interview with Sujit Dutta, Professor, Nelson Mandela Centre of Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi, 9 March 2012.

the Congress party-led government that New Delhi should revoke such unilateral recognition. Such assertions have been periodically made, amid reports of Chinese crackdown on protesters in Tibet. “The government has been having a very weak stand on the Tibet issue only because of the pressure from the Left parties. It is an appeasement towards China and the government has no regard for the country’s honour,” then BJP President Rajnath Singh said on 31 March 2008.<sup>12</sup>

In 2010, the UPA government took an altered position on Tibet. During the visit by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to New Delhi in December 2010, the joint statement by both countries did not reiterate India’s one-China policy—which states that Taiwan and Tibet are part of China. This was a significant first in Sino-Indian relations, in the last four summit-level joint statements.

Apart from the minimal pressures from the pro-Tibet lobby within India, two factors appeared to have influenced the government’s position of using Tibet as a bargaining tool with China. Firstly, the opinion built up by a section within the strategic community for a reversal of the policy.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, much of the altered government position is located in the sense of unease sourced from the Chinese position on Jammu & Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh. While New Delhi refrained from declaring Tibet as an independent country or a disputed territory, it certainly attempted to elicit a ‘one-India policy’ from China in return for its ‘one-China policy’.

In 2010, Beijing started issuing stapled visas to residents of the state of Jammu & Kashmir. On occasions, army personnel serving in anti-militancy duties too were given such visas, unacceptable to the Indian immigration officials. Protests by New Delhi and a request to discontinue the practice did not have any impact on the Chinese embassy.

Beijing backed down on the practice of stapling visas only after New Delhi equated Tibet with Kashmir and demanded ‘mutual sensitivity’ on its sovereignty over Kashmir in return for recognising China’s core

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12 “Nehru had recognised Tibet as part of China: Rajnath”, *Times of India*, 1 April 2008.

13 Author’s interview with Sujit Dutta, New Delhi, 9 March 2012.

concerns over Tibet.<sup>14</sup> During Wen Jiabao's visit, Foreign Minister S. M. Krishna made a categorical statement that Jammu & Kashmir was integral to India just as Tibet was to China.<sup>15</sup>

In recent times, New Delhi has also taken steps to improve relations with Taiwan, heralding a departure from a cautious approach in deference to Beijing's sensitivities. Several recent developments are pointers towards this phase of India's assertive policy. In April 2012, Republic of China (ROC) President Ma Ying-jeou made a stopover in Mumbai en route to Africa. The visit was historic considering the fact that India had never allowed a serving ROC president to land on its soil. The ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs described Ma's stopover as a "sign of improving ties" with India, even though New Delhi itself barely remarked on the event. Ma Ying-jeou's 2007 visit, then as an opposition leader and presidential candidate had drawn Beijing's call to New Delhi to respect the one-China policy.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Taiwan has moved to open a representative office in Chennai, bringing the total on the Indian subcontinent to two.<sup>17</sup>

### **Border dispute along the eastern sector**

China claims 90,000 square kilometres of territory from India in the

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- 14 "India's Tibet Card", *Hindustan Times*, 3 March 2012, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/India-s-Tibet-card/Article1-820403.aspx>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.
  - 15 Indrani Bagchi, "India Declines to Affirm 'One China' Policy", *Times of India*, 17 December 2010, [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-12-17/india/28261765\\_1\\_stapled-china-india-india-and-china](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-12-17/india/28261765_1_stapled-china-india-india-and-china). Accessed on 4 July 2012.
  - 16 A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman commenting on the visit had asked India to adhere to the "one China" policy on the sensitive Taiwan question and "properly" handle relevant issues. "We have taken note of the relevant report. We hope that the relevant country can adhere to the 'One China' policy and handle the relevant issues properly", he said. See "China asks India to Adhere to 'One China' Policy on Taiwan", *Hindustan Times*, 14 June 2007, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/RestOfAsia/China-asks-India-to-adhere-to-One-China-policy-on-Taiwan/Article1-230098.aspx>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.
  - 17 Manik Mehta, "India's Changing Attitude Toward Taiwan", *Taiwan Today*, 17 June 2012, <http://taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xItem=192274&ctNode=426>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.

eastern sector, which includes the entire northeastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, spread over 83,743 square kilometres. In 1960, India rejected a swap offer made by China's former Prime Minister Zhou Enlai asking India to recognise China's control of Aksai Chin in the west as a quid pro quo for China's recognition of the McMahon line.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, India initiated a "forward policy" to control Arunachal Pradesh. The policy was blamed for having induced the 1962 war between India and China<sup>19</sup>, has but has retained Indian control over the state.

While both countries have maintained a tranquil border since 1993 and have engaged each other in several rounds of discussion, China's aggressive behaviour has been manifested in not just producing maps that show the state as Chinese territory, insisting that the residents of the state do not need a visa to visit China, protesting the visit of Indian politicians and army officials to the state, but also by repeated violations of the border line by its forces.

In May 2007, China denied a visa to Ganesh Koyu, an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer from Arunachal Pradesh, part of a 107 IAS officer study team visit to Beijing and Shanghai. China pointed out that Koyu is a Chinese citizen since he belongs to Arunachal Pradesh and hence could visit China without a visa. In June 2009, China tried to block India's request for a US\$2.9 billion loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as the request included US\$60 million for a flood management, water supply, and sanitation project in Arunachal Pradesh. Subsequently, in October 2009, China expressed deep dissatisfaction when Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh visited Arunachal Pradesh during the campaign for the state assembly elections. The Chinese foreign ministry spokesman asserted that such visits trigger disturbances in the "disputed region". In November 2009, China protested the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh. The spokeswoman for China's foreign ministry asserted that

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- 18 The McMahon Line was drawn up by British India's Foreign Secretary, Sir Henry McMahon, in 1914 but is not accepted by China.
  - 19 Among the specialists who blame India's "Forward Policy" is Neville Maxwell. See Neville Maxwell, *China's India War: How the Chinese Saw the Conflict*, May 2011, <http://chinaindiaborderdispute.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/neville-maxwell-chinas-india-war.pdf>. Accessed on 5 July 2012.

China's stance on the so-called 'Arunachal Pradesh' is consistent.

The PLA has built a two-lane highway for its military to drive up to the border. This is in addition to the 58,000 kilometre road-rail network and nine new military air fields on the Tibetan plateau, enabling it to deploy 34 divisions of its army in a month. In sharp contrast, the China Study Group found that nearly one fourth of India's strategic border roads totalling 600 kilometres remain unfinished. Due to the delays in seeking environmental clearances and slow work, the project is expected to be completed only by 2017.<sup>20</sup>

Opinions emerging from Arunachal Pradesh have not only been critical of the aggressive Chinese stand, they want India to be more proactive, both politically and militarily.<sup>21</sup> The influential All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) wants New Delhi to "come clean on Arunachal and make plain to China where we belong?"<sup>22</sup>

India's strategic community is divided over how to deal with aggressive Chinese behaviour in India's eastern sector. Some call for India matching any Chinese build up of conventional forces and forcefully and successfully defending its strategic interests.<sup>23</sup> Others call for a more pragmatic approach. "It is high time the sabre-rattling and one-upmanship stopped and China and India find a way to resolve the festering border dispute," says China specialist Srikant Kondapalli. Similarly, C. V. Rangnathan, a former Indian ambassador to China indicated that India needs a pragmatic approach to resolve the border dispute. "We can't keep the matter hanging and a give-and-take approach is the best way to do it."<sup>24</sup>

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20 Sandeep Unnithan, "Not Ready for War", *India Today*, 29 October 2011, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/indian-army-war-readiness-against-china/1/157763.html>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.

21 Namrata Goswami, "China's Territorial Claim on Arunachal Pradesh: Crafting an Indian Response", IDSA Issue Brief, 25 October 2010, [http://www.idsain.org/system/files/IB\\_Chinasterritorialclaim.pdf](http://www.idsain.org/system/files/IB_Chinasterritorialclaim.pdf). Accessed on 5 July 2012.

22 Debasish Bhattacharyya, "The Nowhere People", *Telegraph*, 3 June 2007, [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070603/asp/7days/story\\_7868992.asp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070603/asp/7days/story_7868992.asp). Accessed on 23 June 2012.

23 Author's interview with Sujit Dutta.

24 Subir Bhaumik, "India Climb Down May Help China border Dispute", *BBC*, 17 April 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-17738147>. Accessed on 5 July 2012.

In recent times, voices favourably inclined to indulge in a tactical bargain with China to resolve the border dispute have also emerged. In a seminar held in April 2012, the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh General (Retd.) J. J. Singh said: "It is important to solve the India-China border dispute and for that some give and take is necessary. India will have to move away from our position that our territory is non-negotiable."<sup>25</sup> The statement of the Governor, which could not have been delivered without a clearance from New Delhi, indicated a shift, albeit preliminary, on the part of New Delhi to accept some of the Chinese positions on the disputed international border, in return for a similar gesture from the Chinese side.

However, while the governor's speech could have been only a bait thrown in by New Delhi<sup>26</sup>, it is quite evident that the national security decision-making with regard to Arunachal Pradesh and China has been influenced by both the expectations emerging from the state, a firm position taken by the Indian Army, and its own assessment centred around a limited war doctrine with China.

On 15 October 2010, Indian Army Chief, General V. K. Singh stated that India's armed forces must remain vigilant as the eastern border with China is disputed. Added to the disputed border, he argued, was the fact that China has grown in economic and military might in recent years, and its aggression is becoming a major national security irritant for India. The Indian Army over the years has taken a consistent stand to building its strength along the disputed border.

Since the 1971 Bangladesh war, the Eastern Command of the Indian Army has regularly complained of receiving far fewer resources than those in the north and west of the country. After the 1993 treaty with China, India scaled down to two mountain divisions (the Fifth and Second) in Arunachal Pradesh with two other mountain divisions redeployed to counter-insurgency roles in the rear (the 20th in Assam and the 57th in the Manipur), to be redeployed in the eastern sector as

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25 Ibid.

26 Author's interview with Sujit Dutta, New Delhi.

quickly as required. However, starting 2011, New Delhi has been raising two new mountain divisions, the 56th and the 71st, specifically for Arunachal Pradesh consisting of 1260 officials and more than 35,000 soldiers.<sup>27</sup> Some media reports<sup>28</sup>, however, indicate that a tardy acquisition programme—for heavy-lift helicopters, gunships, howitzers and modern communication systems—threatens to derail this modest addition to its offensive strategy.

A range of proposals cleared by the CCS in recent years demonstrate New Delhi's inclination to conform to a strategic thinking that seeks to improve internal control in the state as well as project military power. For example, in April 2011, the CCS cleared a Rupees 138.95 crore proposal for police modernisation in the state.<sup>29</sup> Police modernisation is a subject under the Home Ministry and usually does not require a CCS consideration. In October 2011, the CCS cleared the proposal for deployment of Brahmos cruise missiles with a 290-kilometre range in Arunachal Pradesh marking India's first offensive tactical missile deployment against China. The three BrahMos missile regiments raised till then had been deployed in the western sector to counter the Pakistan threat. A media report speculated that "these cruise missiles are being deployed to improve India's military reach into the Tibet Autonomous Region and counter China's elaborate missile deployment along the Sino-Indian border".<sup>30</sup>

In addition, India has initiated a project to build 558 roads at a cost of Rupees 500 billion along the border with China and Pakistan. MHA and the Border Roads Organisation maintain that 27, 986 kilo-

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- 27 Sarbari Bhaumik, "Unsettled Border", *Himal-South Asian*, January 2011, <http://www.himalmag.com/component/content/article/3549-unsettled-border-.html>.
- 28 Sandeep Unnithan, "Not Ready for War", op. cit.
- 29 "Arunachal Police Dept Set for a Major Overhaul", *Times of India*, 10 April 2011, [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-04-10/guwahati/29402895\\_1\\_security-scenario-police-force-arunachal-pradesh](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-04-10/guwahati/29402895_1_security-scenario-police-force-arunachal-pradesh). Accessed on 4 July 2012.
- 30 Pranab Dhal Samanta, "China Flexing Muscles, Govt clears Brahmos for Arunachal", *Indian Express*, 17 October 2011, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/china-flexing-muscles-govt-clears-brahmos-for-arunachal/860799/>. Accessed on 21 June 2012.

metres of road projects are expected to be completed by 2030 in a phased manner.<sup>31</sup>

## Politics of trade

Even as political relations between both countries continue to traverse through periods of uncertainty, bilateral economic relations have soared. The bilateral trade figures “which was as low as US\$2.92 billion in 2000”,<sup>32</sup> reached US\$74 billion in 2011 and is expected to reach \$100 billion in 2015. China is one of the largest trade partners of India and vice versa.<sup>33</sup>

This surge in trade between the ‘elephant and the dragon’<sup>34</sup> has opened the space for both neo-liberal strategists as well as the business sector to influence the political as well as national security decision-making process. While conventional Indian perceptions of past Chinese actions colour contemporary thinking of China and the future relationship, among the business sector there is a emphasis on not just moving beyond history, but also to use trade as a tool to preclude the possibility of conflict. The ideas “promoted in the work of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye where nations under the anarchic international system give primacy to absolute gains over relative gains, forged by the economic dimension with the forces of complex inter-dependence at play via regimes, institu-

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- 31 “India Plans Major Road Projects on China, Pak Borders”, *Rediff*, 29 March 2011, <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/the-great-india-china-road-race/20110329.htm>. Accessed on 24 June 2012.
  - 32 *India-China Bilateral Relations*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, <http://mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50042452>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.
  - 33 Shobhan Saxena, “India-China Bilateral Trade Set to Hit \$100 billion by 2015”, *Times of India*, 21 June 2012, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/India-China-bilateral-trade-set-to-hit-100-billion-by-2015/articleshow/14323128.cms>. Accessed on 4 July 2012.
  - 34 Robyn Meredith in her 2010 book, *Elephant and the Dragon* depicts India as an elephant that has been slowly trudging along to gain economic strength while China is a dragon that is intimidating and moving extraordinarily fast to rise to power. See Robyn Meredith, *Elephant and the Dragon: The Rise of India and China and What It Means for All of Us*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, London, pp. 252.

tions and norms”,<sup>35</sup> appear to be at its visible best in the current phase of Sino-Indian relations.

The CII, which set up its office in Shanghai in 2003, serves as the nodal reference point for the Indian business community in China. The CII has established institutional partnerships with organisations like China Council for Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), All China Federation of Industry & Commerce (ACFIC), Ministry for Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC) (renamed as Ministry of Commerce), and the Trade Development Bureau (TDB) to facilitate promotion of bilateral trade and economic cooperation.<sup>36</sup>

That political considerations play a submissive role to economic opportunities was underlined by the visit of Narendra Modi, leader of the right wing BJP and Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat, who led a 20-member business delegation to Beijing in November 2011. Modi, barred from visiting the U.S. for his alleged role in a communal pogrom, highlighted the investment friendly policies of his state. A Chinese transformer manufacturing company Tebian Electric Apparatus Stock Co., Ltd. (TBEA), which has bagged a major contract in Gujarat, lobbied for the state with other Chinese businesses.<sup>37</sup> Incidentally, TBEA in 2011 had created a controversy by printing a map that erroneously showed parts of state of Jammu & Kashmir as part of Pakistan and Arunachal Pradesh as part of China. However, for an investment hungry Gujarat, politics had taken a back seat.

In 2003, a trade conduit was opened at Nathula in Sikkim, a step which Indian commentators interpreted as Chinese acceptance of Sikkim

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35 Amna Mirza, “India and China in the Neo-Liberal World”, *Mainstream*, Vol. 47, No. 14, 21 March 2009, <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article1237.html>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.

36 “CII’s Engagements with China”, *Economic Times*, 29 June 2010, [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2010-06-29/news/27581257\\_1\\_bilateral-trade-ccpit-india-and-china](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2010-06-29/news/27581257_1_bilateral-trade-ccpit-india-and-china). Accessed on 4 July 2012.

37 Saibal Dasgupta, “Narendra Modi in China, says Gujarat is Different From Rest of India”, *Times of India*, 9 November 2011, [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-11-09/china/30377250\\_1\\_gujarat-chinese-investments-narendra-modi](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-11-09/china/30377250_1_gujarat-chinese-investments-narendra-modi). Accessed on 4 July 2012.

as an integral part of India. The Nathula project was initiated after prolonged demands by the state of Sikkim. Even though the trade figures through Nathula have not been encouraging, in 2012 both countries have moved to revive the older Sino-Indian trade conduit, Jelep-La, through Kalimpong in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. The proposal is being considered at the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry.<sup>38</sup> Just like Nathu-la's opening had followed prolonged lobbying by the state of Sikkim, opening up of Jelep-la remains a demand of the West Bengal state, demonstrating the impact of state governments on the decision-making process.

To sum up, while the defence establishment and the bureaucrats are in charge of India's conventional security decision-making, the business sector has assumed a larger than life role in shaping the bilateral economic relations.

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38 Debasis Sarkar, "After Sino-Indian Trade Route through Nathula, now Jelep-La is in the line", *Times of India*, 11 May 2012, [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-05-11/news/31669214\\_1\\_sino-indian-trade-trade-route-nathu-la](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-05-11/news/31669214_1_sino-indian-trade-trade-route-nathu-la). Accessed on 5 July 2012.

# A COUNTER-TERROR ARCHITECTURE FOR INDIA

The terrorist attack in Mumbai in November 2008 that lasted three days and left 164 people dead and scores injured was a game changer. In the words of P. Chidambaram, India's Home Minister: "A billion plus people felt they had been humiliated and the country had been brought to its knees by a small band of terrorists. The security establishment was in disarray and numerous questions were being asked."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the fact that a group of ten trained Pakistani Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) cadres could create mayhem of this scale in a country which has decades-long experience in dealing with organised acts of terror, necessitated a serious re-thinking to address the serious gaps in its security architecture.

## CHIDAMBARAM'S VISION

The immediate fallout of the incident was the replacement of the Home Minister Shivraj Patil, who had received serious flak for being too callous. Under P. Chidambaram, the new Home Minister, a process to erect a counter-terrorism architecture was initiated. P. Chidambaram outlined his vision of a robust counter-terror architecture for the country in a speech he delivered at the Centenary Endowment Lecture of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) on 23 December 2009. The projects included a thorough reorganisation of the prevailing security architecture comprising of political, administrative, intelligence and enforcement elements, by

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1 P. Chidambaram, "A New Architecture for India's Security", Intelligence Bureau Centenary Endowment Lecture, New Delhi, 23 December 2009, <http://static.indianexpress.com/frontend/iep/docs/Chidambaram-speech.pdf>. Accessed on 12 June 2012.

way of refurbishing and empowering the existing institutions, improving their performance by a process of inter-connectedness, and adding new institutions that would address the gaps in investigation, integration and inability to respond effectively to terror strikes.

However, almost three years after the project of erecting a national security architecture was initiated, Home Minister Chidambaram admitted in the 5th Chief Ministers' Conference on Internal Security on 16 April 2012 that India still faces the stark reality of having "not enough police stations; not enough men, weapons and vehicles; not enough infrastructure for the Central police forces; not enough roads; and not enough presence of the civil administration".<sup>2</sup> For a country, which faces a diverse range of internal security challenges, it is indeed an ominous sign.

However, while Mr Chidambaram found it rather easy in the initial days to push through certain projects to augment the capacities of the existing institutions by strengthening the existing laws and creating new bodies for investigation and law enforcement, as days progressed the task of completing his vision became mired in turf wars, both political as well as administrative. The creation of a counter-terror architecture post-Mumbai has been the most controversial project in the country even though there is near consensus across the spectrum regarding prevention of future terror attacks.

This chapter attempts to look closely at the decision-making process in implementing some of the identified projects under the 'new security architecture' from the point of view of the political, legal and administrative power plays. It focuses on four developments: the creation of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and amendments to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act [UAPA] Act, 2008; the proposed setting up of a National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) and a National Intelligence

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2 "International Border, LoC Continue to be Vulnerable: Chidambaram", *Indian Express*, 16 April 2012, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/international-border-loc-continue-to-be-vulnerable-chidambaram/937350/4>. Accessed on 12 June 2012.

Grid (NATGRID). The chapter argues that systemic conditions act as enablers for decision making by way of forging new alliances and arriving at a consensus on building new structures and enacting laws. However, with the systemic conditions becoming unfavourable with the passage of time, the previously forged alliances and consensus have undergone a process of stress, thereby allowing political as well as administrative differences to gain primacy over what had earlier become a national priority. In these circumstances, pushing through new projects becomes a difficult task.

## **DECISION MAKING: ACTORS**

### **Principal actors**

The MHA overseeing internal security affairs in the country is the principal actor in decision making on terrorism and internal strife in India. The MHA has an internal security division which deals with, among other matters, internal security and law & order, insurgency, terrorism, left wing extremism, activities of inimical foreign agencies and terrorist financing.<sup>3</sup> The department is headed by a special secretary who reports to the Home Secretary and six joint secretaries.

Although relatively independent in its decision-making capacities, MHA's decisions are subjected to scrutiny and administrative approval by various ministries such as the External Affairs Ministry, the Finance Ministry and the Defence Ministry. All these ministries also are part of the CCS chaired by the Prime Minister, which provides political clearances to important projects. The Prime Minister is guided in his decisions by the National Security Advisor (NSA) and also the Cabinet Secretariat, which is in charge of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's external intelligence agency.

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3 The other responsibilities of the Internal Security Division are to deal with dealing with the Indian Police Service, Central Armed Police Forces, rehabilitation, grant of visa and other immigration matters, security clearances, etc. See Annual Report: 2011–12, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India, p. 1.

Any legislation or administrative decision pertaining to ‘law and order’, which is a ‘state’ subject in the Indian constitution, is the prerogative of the states, thereby necessitating the approval of the state governments. Thus, implementation of measures that are seen as abrogating the rights of the states vis-à-vis the centre, become contentious. The states need to be consulted prior to such implementation.<sup>4</sup> As a result, states on many occasions too become a part of the principal decision-making apparatus.

### The enablers

The MHA’s decisions are guided by the inputs it receives from the domestic intelligence agency, the IB. The IB functions under the MHA and reports directly to the Home Minister. The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) is an official research organisation under the MHA which conducts research through non-government experts and institutions on issues relating to policing and security affairs. The MHA, thus, retains the option of funding a research project pertaining to any issue that it considers critical for its decision making, and be guided by its findings.

### Peripheral actors

Internal security has been a topic of immense interest among experts and think tanks. Experts consisting of former bureaucrats, police officials and academicians, attached to think tanks or in their independent capacities, produce reports, commentaries and articles in various forums. Although MHA does not have an institutional arrangement for engaging with such people on a regular basis, the various writings do find their way into the ministry’s database and do get incorporated in the policy making.

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4 Centre’s primacy over the states in matters relating to these issues is established through Article 355 of the Constitution that enjoins the former to “protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance and to ensure that the Government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution”.

## DECISION MAKING: CASE STUDIES

### Creation of the NIA and amendment of the UAPA

Among the new institutions set up as part of the new security architecture, the NIA was the first one to roll out. It was established within a month of the 26/11 attacks, through an Act of Parliament. The NIA was empowered to investigate terror-related cases anywhere in the country and to supersede the State police in the investigation and trial of offences under Acts specified in its Schedule.<sup>5</sup> The offences relate to terrorist acts such as hijackings, bomb blasts, attacks on nuclear installations and any other acts deemed as challenging the country's sovereignty and integrity.

One of the key features of the debate over the National Investigation Agency Bill was its hurried enactment in the Parliament along with the amendment to the counter-terrorism legislation, the UAPA. A new section, 43D, was added to the UAPA increasing the maximum period of custodial interrogation of a terror suspect to 180 days, a significant increase over the 90 days allowed under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). Another new provision, Section 43E, introduced the concept of the presumption of guilt of an accused—making it obligatory on part of the courts to view an accused as guilty in the event of recovery of arms and explosives from him.

The ruling Congress party received full support of the opposition BJP, which even alleged that the Congress is being apologetic about tabling these two legislations in the parliament. The BJP claimed that the UAPA was modelled on the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002, enacted by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government their party led.<sup>6</sup>

Only a few dissenting voices marked the debate on the NIA Bill in the parliament. Speaking in the upper house of the parliament, the *Rajya Sabha*, Sitaram Yechury of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-

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5 The NIA operates under an 11-point mandate pertaining to counter terrorism and other national security related investigations. See website of the National Investigation Agency, <http://nia.gov.in/mission.aspx>. Accessed on 23 May 2012.

6 V. Venkatesan & Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, "Limits of Law", *Frontline*, Vol. 26, No. 01, 3–16 January 2009, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2601/stories/20090116260103000.htm>. Accessed on 8 May 2012.

M) suggested an amendment to make mandatory the association of the State government in the investigation and trial of offences. Regarding the amendment to the UAPA, Yechury pointed out that the proposed 90-day period was perhaps the longest in the world. “In Canada, suspects cannot be detained for more than one day. In Russia, the maximum period permissible for detention of a suspect is five days. France limits the period to six days, while Ireland restricts it to seven days. In Turkey, this period can last only up to seven and a half days. In the U.K. [United Kingdom], the House of Lords returned the proposal to increase the period under detention from 26 to 48 days,” he said. D. Raja of the Communist Party of India (CPI) suggested the deletion of the entire clause enabling presumption of guilt of the accused. The *Rajya Sabha*, however, rejected all the amendments before the passing the Bills.

Outside the parliament, on 12 December 2008, a group of 40 eminent citizens of the country wrote a joint open letter to all politicians emphasising that police reforms and not the new laws, were crucial to address effectively the threats to national integrity. The letter called for swift reform and urged all politicians to work collectively towards this end.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, several experts commented that the creation of the NIA without addressing the basic lacunae in the country’s capacities to respond to terror, is indicative of a mere superficial response. Counter-terror expert Ajai Sahni wrote,

far from offering any ‘solution’ to terrorism, these proposals simply confirm that India, today, is a country utterly consumed by irrational belief systems and unexamined faiths. What we see here, is a triumph of form over content, a kind of ‘strategic vastu shastra’—a symbolic shifting about of doors and windows, a shuffling of spaces, that has no realistic impact on the strength or utility of the edifice.<sup>8</sup>

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7 Ibid.

8 Ajai Sahni, “A Triumph of Form over Content”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/ajaisahni/08AS-45Seminar.htm>. Accessed on 12 June 2012.

Toeing a similar line, former IB director Ajit Doval indicated that NIA merely adds

one more standalone platform with no structural integration or operational unification. As a post-event investigation agency, at its best, it might marginally increase conviction rates or get enhanced punishment to few jihadis who, working at suicidal level of motivation, may only find it amusing.” “Had this agency existed before Mumbai carnage, none of the shortcomings that came to light would have been minimized,” he concluded.<sup>9</sup>

However, without adequate deliberation, the Parliament cleared the Bill within four days of its introduction, egged on by Mr Chidambaram who said: “People are looking at us. As I speak today, people are watching us. People will watch us on television tomorrow. People are asking, ‘Is this the Parliament of India the sentinel on TV? Is the Parliament of India an appropriate sentinel to guard our liberty?’”<sup>10</sup>

Two factors appeared to have been responsible for the smooth sailing of the two bills in the parliament: personality factor of the Home Minister and a favourable domestic environment. Chidambaram, who took charge of the MHA after the rather ignominious tenure of his predecessor, made it a point to be acting as a minister who could deliver on the nation’s expectations. He brought along with him a positive image of a successful finance minister and thus, retained significant bargaining and negotiating power vis-a-vis his own party and also the opposition.<sup>11</sup>

While the above point could have been a point of debate, what is undeniable is that the systemic factors—an overwhelming national opin-

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- 9 Ajit Doval, “Will the National Terror Outfit become just another Agency?”, *Times of India*, 12 January 2009, [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2009-01-12/india/28031958\\_1\\_single-agency-intelligence-turf-war](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2009-01-12/india/28031958_1_single-agency-intelligence-turf-war). Accessed on 12 June 2012.
- 10 V. Venkatesan & Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, “Limits of Law”, *Frontline*, Vol. 26, No. 01, 3–16 January 2009, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2601/stories/20090116260103000.htm>. Accessed on 8 May 2012.
- 11 Author’s interview with Gurmeet Kanwal, Director, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi, 8 March 2012.

ion against terrorism—aided the MHA's efforts. A commentator aptly sums up, “Because the NIA was formed when the memories of 26/11 were still fresh, no political party dared to oppose it for the fear of being seen as soft on terror.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, another article concluded that the failure of the country in dealing with the Mumbai attack had created the sufficient conditions favourable for hurrying through such enactments.

The government seems to have been spurred by an urge to come up with a part-response to the cynicism among a section of the TV-watching middle classes in urban India about the political class in general following the failure to prevent the Mumbai attacks. The government seems to see these laws as ways to correct the public perception of not having done enough to combat terrorism.<sup>13</sup>

This was acknowledged subsequently by the Home Minister himself. As per a WikiLeaks cable, he told the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Robert Mueller on 3 March 2009 that he had come “perilously close to crossing constitutional limits”<sup>14</sup> in creating the NIA.

### **Proposed creation of an NCTC**

The idea of an NCTC was first proposed by Home Minister P. Chidambaram as part of his vision of a new architecture for India's security in December 2009. He said that the goal of the NCTC is counter terrorism which will include “preventing a terrorist attack, containing a terrorist attack should one take place, and responding to a terrorist attack by inflicting pain upon the perpetrators”. He insisted that even though the U.S. established its NCTC within 36 months of 9/11 attacks, “India cannot afford to wait for 36 months. India must decide now to go forward

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12 Sushant Singh, “NCTC: Vision versus Reality”, *Mid Day*, 21 February 2012, <http://www.mid-day.com/opinion/2012/feb/210212-Opinion-NCTC-Vision-versus-Reality.htm>. Accessed on 12 May 2012.

13 V. Venkatesan & Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, “Limits of Law”, op. cit.

14 Nirupama Subramanian, “NIA pushing Constitutional Limits, Chidambaram told FBI”, *The Hindu*, 19 March 2011, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/the-india-cables/article1550807.ece>. Accessed on 23 May 2012.

and India must succeed in setting up the NCTC by the end of 2010.”<sup>15</sup> Chidambaram’s vision for the NCTC included a “broad mandate to deal with all kinds of terrorist violence directed against the country and the people”. He said the NCTC would therefore have to perform functions relating to intelligence, investigation and operations.<sup>16</sup>

However, the NCTC, unlike the NIA, faced two categories of hurdles—departmental as well as political. A much larger institution that was envisioned to subsume the existing intelligence organisations within itself, the goal of the NCTC got mired in departmental wrangling. In sharp contrast to Chidambaram’s vision that all intelligence agencies would be represented in the NCTC, the existing agencies, functioning under different ministries with distinct lines of responsibility, did not wish to come under the umbrella organisation under the MHA and were clearly in favour of maintaining their independent identities. For example, the RAW under the Cabinet Secretariat and the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) under the NSA refused to be a part of the NCTC. Even the IB, which reports to the Home Minister opposed the idea of merging itself with the NCTC.

Secretary RAW K. C. Verma, in early 2010, sent a dissent note to the Prime Minister opposing the creation of NCTC. Verma was also supported by the then NSA, M. K. Narayanan who was against the proposed operations wing of the new agency. In a detailed paper submitted to the Prime Minister in his capacity as the NSA, Narayanan pointed out even in the U.S., the NCTC doesn’t have an operations wing. It merely collects, collates and analyses information and then feeds the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), FBI and host of other intelligence organisations. He wrote, “Fusing operations wing of the IB and RA&W would prove to be counter-productive for pre-emptive counter terror operations and unacceptable to states.”<sup>17</sup>

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15 P. Chidambaram, “A New Architecture for India’s Security.”

16 Ibid.

17 Sudhi Ranjan Sen, “Analysis: Why Intel Experts Oppose NCTC”, *NDTV*, 6 May 2012, <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/analysis-why-intel-experts-oppose-nctc-206596>. Accessed on 12 June 2012.

Similar to the NIA, the proposed NCTC had come under a lot of flak from experts who saw no benefit accruing to India's anti-terror capacities from the creation of the new organisation. An expert called this "a wasteful symbolic process, intended to feed the illusion of power, and the pretence of an 'effective response', rather than to augment the substance of counter-terrorism capacities and capabilities".<sup>18</sup> They pointed at the fact that the establishment of the NCTC in the U.S., an experiment which India is merely attempting to replicate, has not been able to prevent terror attacks. "Despite trillions of dollars that have been poured into its CT architecture, and a multiplicity of wars launched abroad to protect the 'homeland', the reality is that U.S. CT success is anything but complete."<sup>19</sup>

Such opposition proved to be the undoing for the Home Minister. On 12 January 2012, the CCS cleared a truncated version of the original version of the NCTC making the proposed organisation a part of the IB. Under the new arrangement, the Director of the NCTC would report to the Director of the IB, Union Home Secretary and Home Minister.

However, in the subsequent months, even the truncated version of the NCTC received opposition from State governments, mostly on the ground of abrogating the principles of federalism. The opposition also pertained to the absence of any consultative process, as well as to specific clauses of the NCTC order, principally including the power of arrest and seizure conferred upon the proposed NCTC's Operations Division, purportedly under Section 43A of the UAPA. In view of the objections voiced by some of the Chief Ministers, the Home Minister through a letter on 24 February 2012, argued that the powers conferred on the NCTC derive from the UAPA amendments of December 2008, and that, when these were brought to Parliament "there was no demur or opposition to either section 43A or the other amendments".<sup>20</sup> The Home Secretary insisted that "there was no need to consult the states

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18 Ajai Sahni, "National Confusion On Terror By Centre", *Outlook*, 1 March 2012, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?280112>. Accessed on 12 March 2012.

19 Ibid.

20 Letter of the Home Minister to Chief Ministers of ten states, "Countering Terrorism Is A Shared Responsibility", *Outlook*, 24 February 2012, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?280082>. Accessed on 11 May 2012.

prior to notifying the NCTC”, since the agency derives its power from the existing UAPA and no new legislation was being proposed for it.<sup>21</sup>

What had clearly gone against the Home Minister was the altered systemic factors that made counter terror a non-priority for politicians. Chidambaram’s personality, which had played a critical role in seeing the establishment of the NIA through in the parliament in the immediate aftermath of the 26/11 attacks, had been clearly weakened. Further, terrorist attacks in Mumbai and Delhi in 2011 had posed questions on the rationale behind creating the new structures.

While Home Minister P. Chidambaram repeatedly cited the creation of NIA as a precedent for the NCTC, opposition came from the Chief Ministers (CMs) on different grounds. For example, Naveen Patnaik, CM of Odisha state objected to the creation of the NCTC under the IB, an intelligence agency. Opposing the apparent empowerment of an intelligent agency, he said: “No other democratic country has given such wide ranging powers to their secret intelligence agencies as has been envisaged in the case of NCTC. Therefore, NCTC should not be a part of the IB. It can be with a separate agency like the National Investigating Agency.”<sup>22</sup>

The fact that NCTC was being hoisted on the states through an executive order and not an act of Parliament and hence not accountable to the judiciary was unacceptable to the CMs. Nitish Kumar, CM of Bihar state cautioned: “Creating a body through executive order, clothing it with legal powers or operations without making it answerable to the courts... and keeping this agency under an intelligence agency will be prone to gross misuse.”<sup>23</sup> While Tamil Nadu CM J. Jayalalithaa suggested that a “sub-committee of chief ministers” be formed to give its recommendations for a NCTC, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, rejected the NCTC outright and suggested that the MHA should prioritise

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21 “Ant-terror hub: Seven CMs take on UPA, Congress downplays threat”, *Kangla Online*, 17 February 2012, <http://kanglaonline.com/2012/02/antterror-hub-seven-cms-take-on-upa-congress-downplays-threat/>. Accessed on 23 May 2012.

22 “CMs offer way out, point to NIA”, *Indian Express*, 6 May 2012, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/cms-offer-way-out-point-to-nia/945927/>. Accessed on 13 June 2012.

23 Ibid.

modernisation of police forces in states by reforming the age-old Police Act. “Police modernisation should be the Centre’s priority and should be brought under planned budget for more funds,” she said.

A last ditch effort to address the opposition was made through a meeting of the Chief Ministers in New Delhi on 5 May 2012. Assurances by both the Prime Minister and Home Minister that NCTC would not infringe on state rights did little to assuage the concerns of the states. The Home Minister defended NCTC saying terror knows no state boundaries and the Home Ministry cited a judgement by the Supreme Court to show that counter-terrorism is within the Central government’s domain.<sup>24</sup> However, the opposition from the states ensured that the project remained in a state of limbo.

### **Proposed creation of NATGRID**

In his 23 December 2009 speech, Chidambaram underlined the need to network all the 21 stand-alone databases that contain vital information and intelligence “to achieve quick, seamless and secure access to desired information for intelligence/enforcement agencies”. These databases included railway and air travel, income tax, bank account details, credit card transactions, visa and immigration records. Chidambaram said that the Central Government has decided to set up NATGRID and the “project is likely to be completed in 18–24 months from now”<sup>25</sup> He insisted that as per his vision of centralisation of all counter-terrorism agencies, the NATGRID will function under the NCTC and to provide quick and secure access to information required by 10 intelligence and law enforcement agencies. In short, NATGRID will seek to automate the current process of localised data collection and make it more efficient without changing any underlying authority or protocols.

Even though the MHA went ahead and appointed a chief for the NATGRID within months of Chidambaram’s announcement, depart-

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24 “10 States oppose Centre, NCTC’s future uncertain”, *CNN-IBN*, 5 May 2012, <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/10-states-oppose-centre-nctcs-future-uncertain/255020-37-64.html>. Accessed on 12 June 2012.

25 P. Chidambaram, “A New Architecture for India’s Security”, op. cit.

mental rivalry and political turf battles slowed down implementation of the project. The NATGRID received its in-principle approval from the CCS in June 2011. Speaking at the conference of the police chiefs of different states on 15 September 2011, Chidambaram set a new timeline for the NATGRID. “Government approved the project on 6 June 2011 and I believe that it is proceeding according to schedule and the phases that have been approved will be completed in 18 months.”<sup>26</sup>

What was apparent was that, similar to the NCTC, decision making on NATGRID had been confronted with an altered systemic condition. With terrorism no longer a priority issue, each of the departments and agencies presiding over the databases that the MHA was trying to access, attempted to protect their turf areas, thereby slowing down the decision-making process, in spite of the MHA’s efforts.

Like the NCTC, which involved negotiations at two levels: inter-ministerial as well as with the state governments, the NATGRID too had to be negotiated with several ministries in charge of the agencies who had been asked to part with their data. Part of their concerns were related to the NATGRID’s organisational structure—one-third officers from the government and two-thirds from the private sector. A culture of confidentiality that the official circles have been marked with viewed the development with “fears, suspicions and departmental turf issues”<sup>27</sup>. Former Home Secretary G. K. Pillai admitted that “people (in different ministries) feel that you (home ministry) can get the information without going to them. These are issues. These are, however, only misplaced apprehensions.”<sup>28</sup>

Among the separate ministries which objected to the NATGRID was the Finance Ministry. It feared that the new agency would allow the MHA uninterrupted access to all the information under its jurisdic-

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26 Speech of P. Chidambaram at the DGPs/IGPs Conference, 15 September 2011, New Delhi, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=75982>.

27 Vishwa Mohan & Himanshi Dhawan, “Natgrid should be cleared by mid-June: Pillai”, *Times of India*, 30 May 2011, [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-05-30/india/29599346\\_1\\_natgrid-home-ministry-ccs](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-05-30/india/29599346_1_natgrid-home-ministry-ccs). Accessed on 1 July 2012.

28 Author’s interview with G. K. Pillai, New Delhi, 10 March 2012.

tion. The unhappiness of the ministry with the idea was reflected in the meagre budgetary allocation of Rupees 28 crore for the year 2011–2012.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, the Defence Ministry as well as the RAW refused to share information with NATGRID, despite assurances that they would be required to share only such intelligence that pertains to terrorism. Other political objections raised against the NATGRID pertained to individual privacy.<sup>30</sup>

G. K. Pillai summed up the objections from different ministries and departments in the following words.

Finance ministry is one. There are concerns from various other ministries. Some are genuine concerns like, how will it work? We may need a legal framework... what kind of system we need to keep in? But most people's objection is out of ignorance. As you explain the system and show that there is a gain for everybody, then they will start to come around.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, prior to the CCS clearance, the MHA had to hold several rounds of negotiations with different ministries addressing their fears. The representatives had to be assured that the MHA is not seeking take over their database and is merely seeking to integrate them under a single authority, with the provision that each of the ministries will still retain control over the database they preside over.<sup>32</sup> As a compromise, the MHA agreed to route all such information through the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), placed within the finance ministry. It was decided that all queries involving bank data flowing into NATGRID will be sent to the FIU, which will in turn gather the information from the banks

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29 "Windfall for NATGRID, NCTC not on agenda?", *Pioneer*, 16 March 2012, <http://dailypioneer.com/nation/50285-windfall-for-natgrid-nctc-not-on-agenda.html>. Accessed on 23 May 2012.

30 Vibhuti Agarwal, "Q&A: NATGRID Chief Raghu Raman", *Wall Street Journal*, 29 June 2011, <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2011/06/29/qa-natgrid-chief-raghu-raman/>. Accessed on 23 May 2012.

31 Vishwa Mohan & Himanshi Dhawan, "Natgrid should be cleared by mid-June: Pillai".

32 Author's interview with G. K. Pillai, New Delhi, 10 March 2012.

and send it back to NATGRID on a real-time basis.<sup>33</sup> An unidentified MHA official told the media, “The concerns of the finance ministry have been addressed. They (home ministry) are not asking for anything more than what is already provided. The concern was that would they be able to access my database without me knowing it.”<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, the budgetary allocation for NATGRID for the financial year 2012–13 went up to a whooping Rupees 364.80 crore.<sup>35</sup>

Quite clearly, the MHA’s negotiations had been made difficult by the change in systemic conditions. The absence of any major terrorist attack ensured that each of these departments and ministries could take both time and liberty to pursue what they consider to be their own turf areas.

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- 33 Namrata Biji Ahuja, “NatGrid has an info-sharing problem”, *Asian Age*, 26 February 2012, <http://www.asianage.com/india/natgrid-has-info-sharing-problem-653>. Accessed on 24 May 2012.
  - 34 “Natgrid gets Cabinet nod”, *Business Standard*, 7 June 2011, <http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/natgrid-gets-cabinet-nod-/438128/>. Accessed on 12 April 2012.
  - 35 “Windfall for NATGRID, NCTC not on agenda?”, *Pioneer*, 16 March 2012, <http://dailypioneer.com/nation/50285-windfall-for-natgrid-nctc-not-on-agenda.html>. Accessed on 23 May 2012.

## POLICY ON LEFT-WING EXTREMISM

New Delhi could suppress the first phase of the Left-wing Extremist (LWE) Naxalite<sup>1</sup> movement with relative ease. The narrative on the LWE's current phase under the banner of the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist), however, has been one of continuous expansion by the extremists and consequent retreat of the state. The movement has suffered a setback in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, but continues to be at its most fierce in parts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar and Maharashtra. Reports in the early months of 2012 further reveal the foray made by the extremists into new areas such as southern and northeastern parts of the country.

According to estimates by the MHA, in 2001 the Maoists were present in 54 districts of the country. In 2011, LWE violence was reported from areas under 270 police stations in 64 districts of eight states. The challenge posed by the extremists remains grave and has been repeatedly described as the "biggest internal security challenge" to the country by the Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. Let alone suppressing it, the central as well as the state governments have struggled to find a response to the unabated extremist violence. The policy on LWE so far has been a curious mixture of trial and error methods, swinging perilously between a hard force centric approach to a soft development approach.

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1 Naxalism, Maoism and left-wing extremism have been interchangeably used in this paper.

### LWE-related fatalities, 2006–2011<sup>2</sup>

Incidents/ Deaths	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Incidents	1509	1565	1591	2258	2213	1755
Civilians	521	460	490	591	720	464
Security forces	157	236	231	317	285	142
Extremists	274	141	199	219	172	99
Total fatalities	952	837	920	1127	1177	705

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section identifies the actors—principal, secondary and peripheral—in the decision-making process, defines their role and competence. The second section comprises of three separate case studies in order to examine the centrality as well as influence exerted by different actors while taking particular decisions. The case studies are (i) Operation Green Hunt, which marked the beginning of a multi-state tactical coordinated offensive against the Maoists in early months of 2010; (ii) A shift from a force-centric approach to a development approach under the auspices of the Rural Development Ministry, in the middle of 2011 and (iii) A case study of the counter-Maoist policy in the eastern state of West Bengal, between 2008 and 2011.

The first case study indicates the influence of the security force establishment over the MHA. The second case study denotes the central role of ‘personality’ in effecting a policy shift. The third case study is a pointer at the ability of the opposition parties and state governments in charting out a policy which is radically different from the one pursued by the centre.

## DECISION MAKING: ACTORS

### Principal actors

Although the MHA is the apex body for decision making on the LWE, the problem transgresses ministerial and departmental boundaries. The

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2 Compiled from Annual Report (various years), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

broad spectrum of contentious issues that the LWE evokes has led to the involvement of several ministries and departments such as Ministry of Environment and Forests, Rural Development, Ministry of Labour and the Planning Commission in the decision-making process. However, it is fair to say that MHA retains exclusive responsibility for managing security force operations against the extremists, whereas the other departments are mostly responsible for the development aspects. The MHA has a Naxal Management Division exclusively devoted to overseeing the problem. The division is headed by an officer of the additional secretary rank and supported by four joint secretaries. However, key policy decisions involving different ministries do reach the CCS for final decision.

The state governments too are the principal actors in the decision-making process. Since the LWE pertain to the ‘law and order’ category, which is a ‘state’ subject according to the Indian Constitution, the primary responsibility for dealing with the extremist movements is bestowed with the state governments.<sup>3</sup> While the centre retains the responsibility for framing the broad policies, allot central armed police forces (CAPFs) to the states in demand, and implement the developmental schemes, the state governments are final arbiters not only on the deployment pattern of the CAPFs but also on the critical factor of whether they want to pursue the LWE cadres at all or not. On a number of occasions the state governments have differed from the broad strategy pursued by New Delhi on LWE which has affected New Delhi’s course of the action on the LWE.

Apart from the periodical exchange of views between New Delhi and the states, and regular visits of the Home Minister to the affected states, the formal meeting point of the centre and the states has been the

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3 Article 246 of the Indian Constitution divides legislative powers into three lists: Union, State and Concurrent. While 97 subjects under the Central category are the responsibility of the Central Government in New Delhi, dealing with the 66 “state” subjects are the exclusive duty of the State governments. Residuary legislative powers rest with the Centre. Moreover, the Centre can enact laws on items in the “state” list, only in case of declaration of a state of emergency. Law and Order is a “state” subject.

annual meeting of chief ministers of the LWE affected states. A practice that started in 2009, after P. Chidambaram became the Home Minister, the meeting has been held regularly under the auspices of the MHA. The actual contribution of the exercise to the decision-making process is highly contested. Amid wide differences among MHA and the affected states, the exercise has mostly degenerated into a forum for expressing divergent views with little scope for convergence or a common policy.

### **The enablers**

The intelligence agencies play the role of enablers in the policy making on LWE. While the state branches of the IB provide regular updates on the LWE situation to the MHA, post-1998, the establishment of the Subsidiary Multi Agency Centre (S-MAC) has established a system of regular flow of information from other agencies which are not under the MHA. These include the state intelligence branch, the RAW and the Military Intelligence (MI).

### **Peripheral actors**

Several actors constitute the second layer of the decision-making process. While none of them are involved in the actual process, their view points do influence the actual decision-making process. This group covers a broad spectrum of academicians, NGO activists, journalists, security experts, think tank specialists and retired government officials. While the role of these peripheral actors has been largely understood to be minimal in the decision-making process, the MHA and other ministries do have a channel of eliciting information from them. MHA in recent years, predominantly through the BPRD has allotted several research projects pertaining to the LWE issue to NGOs and specialists. The findings of these studies do have a bearing on the actual policy making. Each of the ministries involved in the decision making on LWE including the planning commission too conduct research studies on the problem, the findings of which do influence their contribution to the overall decision making on LWE.

## DECISION MAKING: CASE STUDIES

### Operation Green Hunt

Home Minister P. Chidambaram brought a significant change to MHA's approach on the LWE. Prior to his becoming the Home Minister in December 2008, the Ministry is understood to have pursued a largely ambivalent policy on the LWE.<sup>4</sup> Under Minister Shivraj Patil the MHA downplayed the threat and largely pursued an unsuccessful policy of bringing back the extremists into the mainstream. Till his replacement, barely 30 odd battalions of the CAPFS were deployed in the LWE affected states.

Experts indicate that the idea to launch the large security force operation against the LWE cadres was to do with the new Home Minister's intention to effect a radical change in the prevailing state of affairs.<sup>5</sup> By all means, the military operation is largely described to be Chidambaram's brainchild, supported by the security establishment at the centre comprising of the CAPF organisations and the intelligence agencies. A media report quoting an unidentified senior police officer said, "The Prime Minister flagged Naxalism as the main internal security threat several years ago, but it is only after Chidambaram came to North Block that the ministry really began to respond to that warning from the top. We were in a prolonged state of reactive ambivalence, Chidambaram has radicalised it into a fairly provocative pro-activism. He has determined to take the battle to them, it's his dare, not the Naxalites' and that's new."<sup>6</sup>

The Home Minister had been advised by the security establishment that a large scale security force operation can indeed meet the military

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4 Author's interview with A. K. Doval, former Chief of Intelligence Bureau, New Delhi, 8 March 2012.

5 Ibid.

6 Sankarshan Thakur, "PC becomes the flaming arrowhead: Minister adds a sharp edge to Maoist fight", *Telegraph*, 12 October 2009, [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091012/jsp/nation/story\\_11604556.jsp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091012/jsp/nation/story_11604556.jsp). Accessed on 12 June 2012.

might of the extremists and liberate areas under their control.<sup>7</sup> The Directors General of Police (DGPs) of each of the CAPF organisations were on board and each of them promised to spare forces required for the operation. The worsening security situation also ensured that the state governments in each of the affected states consented to the MHA's decision. Several rounds of talks were held between the Home Minister with the Chief Ministers of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal. A consensus to meet the rising threat was arrived at.

Similarly, the inter-ministerial sanction too was obtained through a CCS meeting chaired by the Prime Minister. On 8 October 2009, the CCS cleared the launch of Operation Green Hunt with a proclaimed objective to "clear the forests of the heavily armed naxal cadre and deliver a heavy dose of development that will bring schools, health services, police stations and road building exercises".<sup>8</sup> The Home Minister however, played down the hype saying that the effort is merely "a more coordinated effort by the state police to reassert control over territory or tracts of land where regrettably the civil administration has lost control. And for that purpose we will assist them in whatever manner is possible, particularly by providing paramilitary forces and sharing of intelligence."<sup>9</sup> However, the optimistic mood within the MHA was reflected through the statement of the Home Secretary who declared, "We hope that literally within 30 days of security forces moving in and dominating the area, we should be able to restore civil administration there."<sup>10</sup> The MHA ensured an amassment of 70 battalions of CAPFs to aid the efforts of the state police forces in eleven places along the inter-state junctions.

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7 Author's Interview with A. K. Doval, Former Director, *Intelligence Bureau*, New Delhi, 8 March 2012.

8 Aloke Tikku, "Anti-Naxal offensive to begin in eleven places", *Hindustan Times*, 10 October 2009, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/Anti-Naxal-offensive-to-begin-in-eleven-places/Article1-463353.aspx>. Accessed on 23 June 2012.

9 "Halt the violence! Give me 72 hours", Interview with Home Minister P. Chidambaram, *Tehelka Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 46, 21 November 2009, [http://tehelka.com/story\\_main43.asp?filename=Ne211109coverstory.asp](http://tehelka.com/story_main43.asp?filename=Ne211109coverstory.asp). Accessed on 25 June 2012.

10 Ibid.

Importantly, the decision was taken amid vivid opposition from the experts, NGOs, academia and other peripheral actors. While only a few supported the initiative and termed it as “long over due”, most others were sceptical of the plan. Security expert Ajai Sahni pointed at the lack of force and leadership capacities and prophesised that the “strategies have little possibility of inflicting decisive reversals on the Maoists”.<sup>11</sup> Toeing a similar line K. P. S. Gill, former DGP Punjab predicted that the operation is badly planned and would end in a failure.<sup>12</sup>

Opposition to the operation from civil rights activists, pro-Maoist intellectuals and NGOs, however, were rooted in a different thought process. Author Arundhati Roy claimed that the operation is indicative of the militarisation of the Indian state. “India has to become a police state. The government has to militarise. To justify that militarisation, it needs an enemy. The Maoists are that enemy,” she wrote.<sup>13</sup> Others termed the operation as not targeted at the extremists, but a military offensive against the tribals, in order to facilitate the entry of the Multinational Corporations (MNCs) into the resource rich areas. “For the tribals and the poor, Green Hunt is nothing else but a united front of state and mining corporations to grab their land and rich natural resources by silencing the voices of those who fight for their homeland rights,” an activist opined.<sup>14</sup> A press release by the CPI-Maoist termed the operation as the “biggest-ever state terrorist offensive in the vast adivasi-inhabited hinterland in order to pave way for the unbridled plunder of the region

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11 Ajai Sahni, “Disruptive Dominance”, *Defence & Security of India*, Vol. 2, No. 2, November 2009, pp. 14–21.

12 “Do We Want Our Troops To Get Stuck Like The Americans In Afghanistan?”, *Tehelka Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 42, 24 October 24 2009, [http://www.tehelka.com/story\\_main43.asp?filename=Ne241009coverstory.asp](http://www.tehelka.com/story_main43.asp?filename=Ne241009coverstory.asp). Accessed on 25 June 2012.

13 Arundhati Roy, “The heart of India is under attack”, *Guardian*, 30 October 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/oct/30/mining-india-maoists-green-hunt>. Accessed on 25 June 2012.

14 Ambrose Pinto, “Why We Oppose ‘Green Hunt’”, [http://www.jesaonline.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=348:why-we-oppose-green-hunt&catid=916:adivasis-and-dalits&Itemid=123](http://www.jesaonline.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=348:why-we-oppose-green-hunt&catid=916:adivasis-and-dalits&Itemid=123). Accessed on 25 June 2012.

by imperialist MNCs and comprador big business houses".<sup>15</sup> Historian Ramachandra Guha warned that the operation is a misguided venture that threatened to wreak havoc in India's *adivasi* heartland.<sup>16</sup>

Influence of such peripheral actors had no restraining influence on the decision to launch the operation. Not only that the national opinion was against the extremists, the MHA was able to convince the different ministries, political parties, state governments of the need for a grand scale security force operation to neutralise the extremists. The support of the security force establishment was critical in swinging the balance in MHA's favour.

Given that the support generated by the MHA revolved around the projected success of the operation, setbacks suffered by the forces within a few months of the launch of the operation, reversed the entire process. The CRPF suffered one of the largest casualties in the history of the organisation in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district. A single ambush resulted in the death of an entire company of the force. Another attack within a month resulted in the death of more than 20 police personnel.

### **From a force-centric approach to development approach**

This section does not argue that the MHA's approach towards the LWE challenge was completely devoid of the developmental contents. From the very beginning, development did constitute a part of the holistic policy of the ministry advocated for responding to the extremist threat.

The Government of India believes in a holistic long-term policy in the areas of security, development, ensuring rights of local communities, improving governance and perception management to combat LWE. Most of the security related measures, apart from deployment of CAPFs, are aimed at assisting capacity building by the State forces. On the development front, an Integrated Action Plan covering 78 affected

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15 *Stop this Mass Murder in the interests of imperialist MNCs and Comprador Business Houses*, Press Release of the CPI-Maoist, 26 September 2009.

16 "Operation Green Hunt will escalate violence", *Deccan Herald*, 8 November 2009, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/34792/banner-300x250.swf>. Accessed on 25 June 2012.

districts aimed at providing public infrastructure and services is under implementation. Further, an ambitious Road Development Plan has been envisaged for LWE areas. An Empowered Group of Officers closely monitors the progress of flagship schemes. Special emphasis is being laid on implementation of Forest Rights Act and ensuring entitlement of local communities over Minor Forest Produce.<sup>17</sup>

However, the launch of Operation Green Hunt was based on the premise that pursuing development activities in an area under extremist control isn't feasible. Evidence of this had been sourced not only from the hindrance the extremists posed to the official developmental and infrastructural projects, but also a wanton destruction of schools, roads, government buildings, telephone and electricity towers by the Maoists. The view of the ministry had found resonance in the views of a host of security experts, who advised the government to clear the area first before initiating development activities.

#### Patterns of LWE attacks

Targets	2008	2009	2010
Economic targets	05	17	24
Railway	27	46	54
Telephone exchange/ tower	46	67	45
Power plant	1	2	3
Mining	6	3	9
Transmission pole	24	7	2
Panchayat bhawan	7	23	31
School building	25	71	39
Forest road, culverts, etc	41	126	158

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India

The failure of Operation Green Hunt, as a result of the reversals it suffered at the extremists' hands, thereby sending the security forces

17 "Frequently Asked Questions", Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, <http://mha.nic.in/pdfs/NM-FAQs-140212.pdf>. Accessed on 7 June 2012.

into a defensive mindset, thus formed the basis for a change of approach. The Home Minister's repeated attempts to enthuse the forces to stick to their task failed to achieve much of a result. As a result, the MHA had little option but to downgrade the multi-state operations to focussed area intelligence based operations. The new approach, a result of multiple rounds of dialogue between the Home Minister, ministry officials and the CAPF chiefs, focussed on launching operations with the limited objective of freeing smaller areas under Maoist control.

Saranda forests in Jharkhand, spread over 820 square kilometres and considered to be a decade old bastion of the extremists was freed from extremist control following a month long security force operation in August 2011. The availability of a liberated area, thus, heralded a possibility for the launch of a development approach. In October 2011, a Saranda Development Plan (SDP) was prepared by the West Singhbhum district administration covering 56 villages and a population of 36,000. The plan aimed at building houses for 6,000 households, ensuring employment for the tribal youths, construction of roads and a bridge, distribution of solar lanterns, launch of mobile health units and watershed development projects. The administration also planned to install hand pumps for improving access to drinking water supply.

Jairam Ramesh, new Minister in the Rural Development Ministry is largely considered to be responsible for the policy shift. In the first elaboration of his approach on 11 October 2011 while delivering the Sardar Patel Memorial Lecture, Ramesh outlined a "two-track approach" calling for dealing with the Maoist leadership and revamping of administration and governance in tribal areas. However, in the subsequent months, the approach was expanded to a three-track strategy, called the "3Ps"—by way of adding the agenda of "intensification of political activities" in the extremist belt. On 28 May, Ramesh said, "Political intervention is the need of the hour to eliminate Left wing extremism. Political parties must play a big role to deal with Naxal menace... security forces alone cannot fight the menace."<sup>18</sup> Ramesh's intervention not only ensured a regular

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18 "Ramesh for political intervention into Naxal menace", *Business Standard*, 28 May 2012.

flow of financial resources into the affected district, several other areas in Odisha, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh were also included in the new approach.

Several factors contributed to the policy shift. Apart from the fact that the failure of the force-centric approach created the amenable conditions for the launch of a new approach, the personality of the new Rural development Minister Jairam Ramesh and his proximity with the top leadership of the ruling Congress party were the other critical factors. Ramesh was able to impress upon the Congress top leadership including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh the need to reorient the LWE policy.

Further, Jairam Ramesh's initiative appeared to have been influenced by a host of existing arguments centred around the need to use development as a tool to win the support and confidence of the tribal population, who constituted the critical support mass behind the extremist movement. Among such experts and studies was a report by an expert committee of the Planning Commission, India's nodal official development planning body. The 2008 report<sup>19</sup>, an exhaustive anthology of the roots of tribal discontent and violence, recognised the Maoist movement's political nature and underlined the need for a development-centric approach to the Maoist problem. It made a series of recommendations with regard to the implementation of protective legislation, land acquisition, rehabilitation and settlement and livelihood security.

The new approach was further bolstered by the voices from some of the states who had not been fully convinced of a force-centric approach. For example, the CM of the eastern state of Bihar has always been a protagonist of development and peace talks approach to deal with the extremists. In the neighbouring state of Jharkhand, the installation of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) government under Sibu Soren stalled the security force operation against the extremists. Ramesh was careful to have enlisted the political support from the new Jharkhand

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19 *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*, Report of an expert group to Planning Commission, April 2008, [http://planningcommission.gov.in/reports/publications/rep\\_dce.pdf](http://planningcommission.gov.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf). Accessed on 10 April 2012.

government, following extensive discussions between the Minister and the government representatives.<sup>20</sup>

### Counter-LWE approach in West Bengal

This case study indicates the influence of individual states on the country's LWE policy. As previously discussed, law and order is a state subject according to the Indian constitution, which allows state governments the authority to take a final stand on the approach they wish to pursue against the extremists.

A government consisting of a coalition of various left-leaning political parties ruled the state of West Bengal for much of CPI-Maoist's existence that began with the 2005 merger of Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) and the People's War Group (PWG). Till its ouster by the Trinamool Congress (TC) party headed by Mamata Banerjee in the legislative assembly elections held in 2010, this Left-front government refused to proscribe the CPI-Maoist. Even though the outfit had been banned by both New Delhi and almost all the states it was active in, the Left-front government was of the opinion that banning the movement is of little practical utility. Instead the movement should be politically fought. This non-proscription in West Bengal allowed a large chunk of Maoist cadres to stay in the state, carry out over ground mobilisation activities and even indulge in occasional acts of violence.

West Bengal recorded six deaths among civilians and security forces in 32 acts of Maoist violence in 2007. In the following year, fatalities increased to 26 in 35 incidents. This comparatively low scale violence allowed the state government to resist the temptation of asking for deployment of para-military forces in the state.

The situation, however, turned for the worse from 2008 onwards. A failed extremist ambush on the convoy of the Chief Minister resulted in arrests and abuse of several tribals by the police in the last months of 2007, leading to a popular agitation against the government in the West

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20 Jairam Ramesh, "Give the Saranda Development Plan a chance", *The Hindu*, 6 June 2012.

Midnapore district. This provided an opportunity to the extremists to step in and mobilise the masses. As the state government decided not to intervene, a vast portion of the district was captured by the Maoists who initiated a systematic campaign of violence against the civilian supporters of the government and the police forces. Extremism related fatalities among the civilians and the security forces increased to 158 in 2009, necessitating that the state take the assistance of the CAPFs. Forty companies of central police forces were deployed in the affected district. However, in spite of the MHA's insistence that the available forces play a supporting role to the counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy of the state police, the Left-front government assigned no major responsibility to the police and instead, wanted the central forces to do the bulk of the COIN duty. In order to enforce state police participation in the COIN operations, the MHA had to bring in a caveat. It linked the deployment of central forces in West Bengal to a proportional deployment of state police forces in the LWE affected areas.

The decision taken by the state government to refrain from a policy of hot pursuit against the extremists was not only in contravention of the MHA's force-centric approach, but it also appeared out of place during a time when the extremists were targeting the supporters of the Left-Front for selective killing and had thoroughly dismantled the Left-Front's influence in the tribal belt.

The state government's decision appeared to have been influenced by both its long held position of not becoming a part of New Delhi's military campaign against the extremists and also, electoral considerations. The TC leader Mamata Banerjee's criticism of the state government's decision to deploy central forces in West Bengal and call for their withdrawal added to her popularity. Banerjee repeatedly called for withdrawal of the central forces and a peaceful solution to the LWE problem. Some of the coalition partners in the Left-front government too were critical of the operations by the central forces in the state.

A similar policy of inaction against the LWE was continued by the TC, after it won the elections. Just like the previous Left-Front government, TC leader Mamata Banerjee became a prisoner of her own stand taken during her days in the opposition. Immediately after assuming

responsibility as Chief Minister, she put a stop to all security force operations against the CPI-Maoist. She pushed forward a peace and development approach towards the Maoists, even without reciprocity. A peace committee was constituted to take the peace process forward. In 2010, the fatalities in extremist violence reached 258, making West Bengal the second worst affected state behind Chhattisgarh.

The MHA, however, was more tolerant of Banerjee's actions and this was linked to political considerations.<sup>21</sup> TC being a coalition partner in the UPA government in New Delhi was crucial for the latter's survival. As a result, even though her regime merely continued the policies of her predecessors, New Delhi chose to wait and watch. Home Minister Chidambaram advocated the inalienable right of West Bengal to decide on its own policy against the LWE issue, even though he continued to be critical of states who were not enthusiastic participants in the force-centric approach against the extremists.

Banerjee's policy was reversed only after the Maoists started targeting TC workers in the affected area. Following a series of killings of her party workers, the peace process was annulled, the peace committee's members resigned and full-scale security force operations were launched against the extremists. The CPI-Maoist's fortunes dwindled quickly after it lost a number of top leaders to arrests and killings. It was apparent that the political inertia of past three years had led to the emergence of the LWE threat in the state, which was decimated after political sanctions to pursue the extremists were secured.

This case study is indicative of the influence of the states on the LWE policy and is also demonstrative of the factors that influence New Delhi's decision to be more or less tolerant of such policies. Regional politics have played a critical role in deciding the nuances of New Delhi's LWE policy and have prevented, to a large extent, the evolution of a policy of consensus on the LWE challenge.

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21 Author's Interview with Gurmeet Kanwal, Director, Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, 7 March 2012.

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## CONCLUSION

**A**nalyses of the decisions pertaining to national security reveal three distinct trends. First, the decision-making process has become complex with an expansion of the list of influential actors. Second, successful decisions taken still remain personality oriented or are aided by favourable systemic or domestic conditions. In the absence of towering personalities and enabling conditions either no decisions could be taken or the compromised decisions barely fulfilled their stated objectives. And third, the overstretched bureaucracy plays a pivotal role in the process without necessary expertise and competence, and on most occasions, has prevented the emergence of structures that could aid the decision-making apparatus.

India's Afghan policy is a narrative of reactionary decision-making, affected by extremely hostile systemic conditions and a divided strategic opinion back home. India's decision not to involve itself in the military operation against the Taliban and stick to a unique developmental approach has earned it immense goodwill among the Afghans. However, this has neither protected its interests in the war torn country, nor has it ensured its durability in the scenario of an international troop pull out. The policy on reconciliation has undergone several revisions, reflecting a narrow and straight-jacketed understanding by the bureaucracy of the ethnic politics in Afghanistan. New Delhi's search for a formula to stay put in Afghanistan, is currently being shaped by the business sector. The perceptible shift from an aid and assistance programme to one led by investment is one of India's best steps forward. However, it is an initiative that the bureaucracy is not responsible for.

China continues to pose a serious dilemma for the decision making in India. The bureaucracy, the prime actor in formulating the policy,

has found it difficult to break from the past policies in spite of several instigations. Torn between a stand to normalise its relations with China and playing second fiddle to a U.S. policy of containment of Beijing, India's security policies have demonstrated significant tentativeness and vulnerability. The bureaucracy acknowledges the need for a limited war doctrine, yet has not empowered the Army sufficiently to deal with one, when it arises. It feels threatened by the Chinese infrastructure building activities in Tibet and yet is slow in initiating projects in its own side. Its policies on Tibet represent a divide between idealistic policies and real-politik. And similar to Afghanistan, the economic relations between the two countries have soared and it is not a contribution of the bureaucracy.

India's effort at establishing a new security architecture reveals some of the most disturbing trends. While in the immediate aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks, the central government could push through a series of reforms, courtesy a very persuasive Home Minister and an overwhelming national opinion against terrorism, subsequently such support evaporated. Today, there is not only a complete lack of unanimity on the reform process, but divisive politics and the electoral strength of the states are threatening to derail the process altogether. On the surface, federalism, far from being a source of strength for the Indian state, has created enormous difficulties in shaping the anti-terror architecture. On the other hand, the MHA's stress on creating new structures, at the expense of the basics and ignoring the opinions of the strategic community, is leading to the establishment of an architecture that is hollow from within.

The surging Left Wing Extremism has exposed the indecisiveness among the Indian government. The personality of the Home Minister P. Chidambaram and failure of his predecessor to stem the rising trend of extremism had provided an unprecedented support to a force centric approach advocated by the MHA. This was done against the opinions of the strategic community and the NGOs. However, setbacks suffered by the forces at the hands of the extremists led to a collapse of the grand war campaign. The rise of the development approach, courtesy the Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh follows a similar trajectory. However, given the structural and functional opposition his approach has

faced, the development approach too be heading towards a failure. The state governments, in spite of their dependence on the central forces, remain powerful enough to pursue strategies diametrically opposed to MHA's efforts. Electoral politics guides MHA's level of tolerance towards such anomalies. As a result, decision making on left-wing extremism is mired in controversies, is ad hoc and nowhere close to forging a national consensus.

In sum, there are enormous challenges for the national security decision-making apparatus in India. Some are externally driven, but much of it is its own creation. Needless to say, reforms are a dire necessity to address the anomalies. The bureaucracy needs expansion, quality upgradation and it must be made amenable to intervention from outside. Similarly, the country must institute structures to manage the negative impact of domestic politics on policy making. Insulating national security decision-making from the pitfalls of electoral politics and a willingness to effect a makeover on the bureaucratic apparatus will remain linked to New Delhi's ambitions of becoming a great power.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This monograph explores the structures and processes involved in India's national security decision-making on Afghanistan, China, counter-terrorism architecture, and left-wing extremism. While providing a historical backdrop, each case looks primarily at contemporary decision-making. Rather than confining itself to a narrow 'realist' definition of national security, the study adheres to a broader canvas embracing trade and other systemic aspects of security. Using available open sources as well as interviews, the author argues that national security decision-making in India has become complex owing to changes at both domestic and systemic levels and to the emergence of new actors. The lack of a doctrine on national security and necessary structures has led to 'reactive and ad hoc' national security decisions. The author concludes that the chief challenges to India's decision-making apparatus are internal rather than external and suggests appropriate reforms.



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