INDIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY: CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to be asked to deliver the P.C. Lal memorial lecture this year. The topic selected is a very wide one, as it should be for a lecture in memory of someone like Air Chief Marshal (ACM) Lal. His contributions to the nation were wide-ranging and manifold, ranging from national security to Indian air power and doctrine to defence industry to civil aviation and to allied subjects. After his education in St. Stephens College and King's College, London, he had a distinguished war record in World War II, displayed his command of air strategy in the 1965 and 1971 Wars, and made major contributions to building up Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) as Managing Director (MD), and to civil aviation as Chairman and MD of Air India and Indian Airlines simultaneously.

His autobiography and his seminal 1975 USI National Security lecture on "Some Problems in Defence" are well worth reading even today.

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They remind us of his eminent good sense, his strategic vision and his systems approach, optimising available resources. Dipping into ACM Lal's autobiography, one is reminded of the importance of thinking for ourselves, given the uniqueness of India's situation. In the 1965 and 1971 Wars, we saw the results of his systems approach, of making the best of what we had, with brilliant results for the Indian Air Force. But you know this better than I do.

Air Chief Mshl Lal's USI National Security lecture spoke of "responsible planning", of "thinking purple" or jointness, of military officers in the Ministry of Defence, and of the proposal for a Chief of Defence Staff, which Gen Chaudhury had raised before him. It is worth reminding ourselves today of what Air Chief Mshl Lal advocated. He said, "Clear political direction, intelligent cooperation between the civil and the military authorities and close collaboration among the three Services" were what was needed. He never made Trenchard's claim of "substitution" between one Service and another or between civil and military. Instead, he was an advocate of all three Services, and the civil and military authorities, working together in the most productive way, and he lived his life by his principles.

He was truly a leader who lived a full and integrated life, whose work and writings are still relevant and bear repeating.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A few days ago a young colleague of mine sent me an article by K.M. Panikkar, from the journal *International Affairs* of January 1946, about the defence and security of India. He distinguished between the defence of India (i.e., its internal organisation, the structure and maintenance of our armed forces, and so on) and the security of India. Panikkar said, "The Indian security sphere covers the entire Indian Ocean area. India's interest in the security of the Persian Gulf, the integrity and stability of the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan, the neutralisation of Sinkiang and Tibet

and the security of Burma, Siam and the Indo-Chinese coastline, apart, of course, from Malaysia and Singapore, is obvious enough to all". Panikkar believed and argued that for its security, India must become the pivot of an organisation meant to preserve peace in this large area, with the primary security responsibilities remaining with Britain, and with defence as India's responsibility. It was his view that that India's defence should be based on a "ring-fence concept". What Panikkar said about the ring-fence was really no different in substance from what Hastings, Dalhousie and Curzon had said before him, and he admitted as much with some pride.

Very soon after Panikkar wrote the article, developments in India, (partition and independence), the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Cold War, the state of the post-War world economy, and several other factors made his ideas and plans academic, influenced as they clearly were by the colonial after-effect on Indian minds. Fortunately for India, we had in Nehru someone who saw things much more clearly. He chose and persuaded India to follow a strategy of non-alignment instead. The happy results of that choice are evident in the degree of strategic autonomy that India now enjoys.

Re-reading the 1946 article I was struck by how today we still hear echoes of a similar mindset, and by what an inaccurate prediction and solution it offered to the national security challenges that the Indian republic actually faced in its sixty plus years. One can think of many reasons for this. In the last sixty years, Indian capacities have been transformed, the world around us has changed radically, technology has developed at an unprecedented pace, and there have been at least two revolutions in military affairs.

But the most important change, to my mind, has been in how we define India's interests, how that definition has grown, and in our ability to begin to think for ourselves and to strive for strategic autonomy. To a very great extent, we owe the basis for this to Nehru and his generation of leaders, but each subsequent generation, from every party, has contributed to this process. Our definition of security has gradually expanded over time from the defence of our territory to include providing the necessities for our existence and growth such as energy and water, and to larger issues of global and regional security. We now speak of traditional and non-traditional

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security and even of human security, as if there were any other kind.

One other way in which Panikkar's 1946 article was inaccurate in its view of our national security was the way it underestimated the air and maritime imperatives that face us today, and the increasing role of air and technology in our national security calculus. (In saying so, I take outer space and our use of it as a natural extension of our reach into the air.)

So how should one think about the national security of a country like India, a subcontinent, with a unique geography, with plurality in every respect, which faces 21st century challenges in cyber space and primeval tribal insurgencies at the same time?

Let me state my bias or assumption at the outset.

Hard security, or external defence and internal security as traditionally defined, are core and are essential conditions for India to be able to transform itself and seek prosperity and opportunity for its citizens. This is true no matter how new challenges and technology may have changed the tests that face us. We must not confuse purpose (such as welfare) with means (such as law and order) or the situation. Take, for instance, energy security. That is a goal, and, like absolute security, is probably an unattainable one in absolute terms or in isolation from others. Among the means to reach that goal are security of energy sources, of sea lanes of communication, and so on, and they require hard power instruments and the willingness to use them.

Let us now consider the sort of national security challenges that India faces today. (I do so in the certain knowledge that fifty years from now, someone will read this and say how wrong we were in anticipating the real challenges of the next fifty years.)

My starting point is that thanks to what our predecessors like P.C. Lal achieved, India today does not face an existential threat. But it does face several internal and external threats and challenges that could prevent us

from realising our potential and our goal of building a strong and prosperous nation where each citizen has the opportunity to fulfil his potential.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Even with an expanded definition of national security, I would suggest that today our national security challenges are in five main areas.

Internal Security

National security begins at home, even as today the distinction between internal and external challenges is increasingly blurred.

For a nation undergoing social and economic change at a rate unparalleled in its long history, and where aspirations are rising exponentially, India as a society is remarkably at peace with itself. It is hard to think of other societies at comparable stages of development with such low levels of violence. It may not seem so in the face of the daily drumbeat of sensational and horrific stories in the media. But the facts bear this out.

Let us look at the facts.

Communal violence is lower in the last five years than before.

Left Wing Extremism (LWE) took fewer lives in 2011 than in 2010.

Insurgencies in the northeast have taken their lowest toll in the last two decades in the last five years.

And Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) had a relatively peaceful year in 2011. The record turnout in the Panchayat polls shows the overwhelming desire of the people of J&K to lead normal fulfilling lives and be in democratic control of their own futures.

But these figures hide two major challenges.

Some of our instruments of internal security are in disrepair. China spends more on internal security (US$ 111 billion in the last budget) than she does on external defence (US$ 106 billion) by the official count. We spend less than one-third of our defence budget on internal security. And that too is far less than comparable states with our diversity and geographical spread spend on internal security and policing.

Add to this our reliance on 19th century laws and police structures

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inherited from a colonial power. Some progress has been made in our attempts to reform and modernise them; other efforts are thwarted by the bogey of freedom or federalism in danger or on other grounds of local expediency.

Secondly, the threats that we face are much more potent than those that our structures were designed to cope with. Look at the firepower that the Mumbai attackers brought with them. And think of what state sponsored terrorists could have access to, up to, and including, weapons of mass destruction such as chemical, biological and radiological weapons.

Counter-terrorism is one area where we have made considerable progress since the Mumbai attack, establishing and strengthening our intelligence capabilities with the MACs and NATGRID, amending the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), establishing and empowering the National Investigation Agency (NIA), and undertaking the modernisation of police forces by assisting the state governments. But when it comes to giving practical effect to the amendments to the UAPA to be able to counter terrorism, we are still to achieve clarity on the establishment of the National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC). I would only hope that a reasoned and informed debate will enable us to move forward to take the practical steps that are necessary.

A Peaceful Periphery

There is no question that we need both a peaceful periphery and a supportive external environment if we are to transform India. For most of independent India's existence, both have been in short supply. But, in the last two decades or so, we have seen an improvement in both situations, with the situation in our neighbourhood stabilising and improving, and the global economic and geo-political situation conducive to our rapid economic change.

South Asia and the Indian Ocean region are our home and immediate neighbourhood. We have a stake in the peace, stability and prosperity of our neighbours, whether across the waters or on our land borders.

But by stating this, we raise the issue of how active we should be in bringing about the desirable outcome of a peaceful periphery. Do we hope that it will come about on its own? Or do we actively work with our neighbours who share our approach? We certainly should not interfere in others' internal affairs, even in the name of spreading peace or enforcing peace. But to what extent do we respond to requests for security assistance and commitments? These lines are not self-evident in the face of events on the ground. Can or should India be a net provider of security in the region and, if so, to what extent? India's role as a regional security provider would not be a new role, historically speaking. These are serious questions, even if my manner of posing them is not subtle enough to frame the issue properly, and I think that it is time that we debated them for ourselves.

When we look around our periphery today, we witness historic shifts and changes of unprecedented magnitude. West Asia, which is home to 6 million Indians and is critical to our security in so many ways, is in turmoil. The rise of radical and extremist elements, the prospects of proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the effects of the turmoil on energy security and markets make the rapidly changing situation in West Asia and North Africa a security concern for us and other powers.

While intent is the stuff of diplomacy, the national security calculus must include, and prepare to deal with, the capabilities we see around us. Today, the larger region in which we are situated is also that part of the world where the balance of power is shifting most rapidly. In Asia, there are several rising and established powers in a crowded geo-political space. Asia is in the midst of one of the most impressive arms races in history though, in the Asian manner, we are too polite to say so in public. Some calculations suggest that for the first time in several centuries, Asia's spending on defence is poised to overtake Europe's. Whether this is modernisation or a strategic arms race is a matter for professional debate. But the net effect is to pose new issues for our conventional defence.

The Defence of India

The third national security challenge is, therefore, our conventional security,

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or the defence of India.

Apart from the complex situation that surrounds us, there are also rapid changes in the very nature of warfare.

Last year marked the centenary of the first use of an aircraft as an instrument of warfare. After one hundred years, Italian pilots were bombing Libyan targets all over again. But the difference was apparent. In the century of aircraft as an instrument of war, the capabilities of air power have grown exponentially. (The first attack, dropping grenades on a remote camp, produced a few non-combatant casualties and had no significant military effect. That is not true of the air campaign over Libya last year which had significant military and political effects and large-scale civilian casualties.) Over the last hundred years we have seen ever increasing faith in the ability of air power to achieve a set of discrete military and political missions.

[Interestingly, the potential of air power was recognised long before it became reality. In 1907, the major powers signed the Annexes to the Hague Convention which prohibited air attacks on towns, villages, churches and hospitals, even though the technology to do this did not exist at the time! I suppose it is easier to ban what does not exist.]

And we have expanded the way in which we think of air power to include several new aspects. On September 11, 2001, terrorists used air power for their ends, proving that air power is no longer exclusively with the state. The nuclear domain was originally entirely a matter of aircraft, later expanded to missiles and submarines.

Today, the very instruments of power are undergoing change as a result of technological development. You know best how information technology has changed your platforms and empowered both state and non-state actors.

Technology has opened up new domains of contention in cyber space and outer space, and this contention takes unusual or unexpected forms.

In West Asia, since the beginning of 2011 we see the use of cyber space through a new cocktail of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), social

media, saturation TV and Special Forces to arouse people and target regimes. We have seen that virtual reality, working with people's aspirations and hopes, can have kinetic effects, even effecting regime change in certain conditions.

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In the last few years, we have made a beginning in India to put in place a series of measures to enhance our cyber security. India is fortunate to have most of the necessary cyber skills, people and knowledge available within our own country. What we need is the coordination of national effort across the private and public sectors, new ways of organising ourselves, and new habits of working. We are now working on a national cyber security architecture which will enable us as a nation to step up security in this important new domain.

These are domains that require new learning and new national security structures and doctrines, integrating the instruments of national power across sectors.

An Enabling Global Environment

I mentioned earlier that the external environment is no longer as supportive of the transformation of India as it has been for the last two decades. This extends from the prolonged global economic downturn, to the turmoil in West Asia, to the shifting balance of power in Asia, and the consequential increasing tension around regional hot-spots like North Korea, Syria and Iran.

The financial crisis in the major Western capital markets of 2008, followed by a prolonged downturn in these former drivers of the world economy, has had geo-political consequences. To some extent, they have accelerated previous trends, such as the relative rise of China and some of the other emerging economies, and the shift in the geo-political centre of gravity to Asia. During this decade, the majority of the world's economic growth will take place in the so-called developing world for the first time in over two centuries – driven in large part by China, India and other Asian economies.

Both our dependence upon, and our influence in, the external world have grown exponentially in the last two decades.

The economic downturn in the developed countries, combined with the global rise in commodity prices, has given an edge to the natural competition for energy and the resources necessary to sustain economic growth and activity, and for access to markets. We already see the protectionist tinge in developing country rhetoric, and their actions speak louder than their words.

Interestingly, both our dependence upon, and our influence in, the external world have grown exponentially in the last two decades. Today, the external sector accounts for a little over 40 percent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), almost twice what it did in 1991, (and half the same proportion for China today). Our access to external markets and resources (including technologies, capital goods and raw materials), therefore, becomes critical not just to the health of our economy but to our national security itself. If we are not able in the years to come to provide the jobs and skills that our young population needs for India to reap the demographic dividend, it will have profound consequences on our internal security.

All in all, we face an external environment where managing uncertainty will form a much larger part of our national security strategy.

Creating National Security Capabilities

We clearly have an ambitious and growing national security agenda flowing from the challenges we face. This naturally raises questions about the adequacy of our institutions and national security structures in dealing with such challenges.

Recognising this, the government has set up a high level task force to review our national security structures, ten years after the report of the Group of Ministers on the national security system after the Kargil conflict began to be implemented. We expect them to report to the government soon, basing their recommendations on the widespread consultations that they have carried out in the country.

The task is to create the appropriate structures or adapt existing national security structures so as to deal with the new challenges. This will not be easy, or necessarily smooth, as the NCTC experience shows, for we are now in uncharted waters. And the barometer is dropping. I would, therefore, argue that creating national security capabilities is our fifth major national security challenge.

In the nuclear domain, an elaborate doctrine of deterrence and balance has been evolved to eliminate the temptation to preemption.

Equally, it is essential that our existing capacity performs up to its potential. This is particularly so for our defence industrial base, which is in need of review, upgrading and would benefit from modern management and efficiencies.

But most important is the need to integrate the instruments of national power to deal with the national security challenges that we now face in cyber and outer space, in energy security, and in internal security. That, it seems to me, is what these challenges demand of us.

FEATURES AND LESSONS

What conclusions can one draw from this broad brush review of our main national security challenges? Two features of these challenges should cause us to question and rethink our strategies and to learn new lessons.

One is preemption or prevention.

Interestingly, in the new domains (of cyber and space), prevention or even preemption can often appear to be the only real and effective response. Reacting after the event or inflicting subsequent punishment does not seem a satisfactory response any more, unlike past military conflicts and situations.

We have already learnt to deal with nuclear conflict and competition differently from conventional conflict. In the nuclear domain, an elaborate doctrine of deterrence and balance has been evolved to eliminate the temptation to preemption. Assured and massive retaliation is what prevents the use of nuclear weapons as war-fighting weapons. In effect, we, and the nature of the weapons themselves, have made the consequences of their use too horrific to contemplate.

But this issue also arises today in relation to terrorism or cyber attacks, where the consequences of waiting for an attack are very serious and sometimes too great to bear. These are also domains where there is a temptation to act before rather than after the event. Here too, we need to evolve doctrines and capabilities and strategies to prevent unacceptable levels of damage. This would require us in India to create capabilities which in themselves will dissuade or deter threats, and will cause our enemies to desist. Increasingly, what we are called to deal with, and develop, are preventive or avoidance strategies.

This is not a theoretical debate though it may sound like one. In the UAPA amendments after the Mumbai attacks, we recognised the need for counter-terrorism to prevent the commission of terrorist acts before they occur. The Act, as passed by Parliament, said in Section 43 that we would do so. But when, almost three years later, we tried to operationalise this provision in the Executive Order establishing the NCTC, there has been considerable debate, to put it politely, about the NCTC taking preemptive action when there is clear evidence that a terrorist act is contemplated. We need to come to a national conclusion on this debate, for events will not wait upon our cogitations.

If prevention and preemption are necessary in counter-terrorism, cyber space and new domains where the speed of operations or scale of damage make traditional responses too tardy, we must also answer questions about the command and control of these functions. Are we being led by technology into more unpredictable actions and hair-trigger reactions just when our complex economies and societies require predictability and steadiness more than ever before? Looking around the world, it certainly appears that while we have managed to keep the nuclear peace, in cyber space, the traditional restraints are no longer operating, and command and political control is tenuous at best.

I must confess that I have no simple solution to offer to these questions. But these are issues that we must think through, and I cannot think of a better audience to pose them to.

Secondly, technology is both the problem and the solution.

It is clear that while empowering the state in its security functions, technology has also empowered non-state actors. We have seen the use of the internet for terrorist recruitment and to radicalise youth, the kinetic effects that manipulating virtual reality can produce, and the sheer lethality that technology places in the hands of individuals.

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And as our society gets more complex, advanced and integrated, we are increasing our vulnerabilities and creating platforms for those who want to do us harm. Equally, as it requires more predictability, our society has more to lose if we fail to deal with these challenges. In our search for predictability, we must now plan for the unplanned (like natural disasters), and think the unthinkable (in domains like nuclear war). The scope of what we consider relevant to the defence of India has grown as India has progressed and grown more complex.

The answers to these challenges, whether in cyber space or elsewhere are also to be found in technology.

And to use technology as the solution we must have in India the people with the necessary skills and training to enable us to deal with each of these challenges. We need to invest in our own people, not just by giving them the opportunity to learn and develop the necessary skills but by giving them the careers in this area that would attract them.

CONCLUSION

By listing these challenges and issues, many of which sound like threats, I do not wish to create alarm or leave the impression that we are in peril. I am acutely conscious of this because doubts have been raised in public recently about our defence preparedness and acquisition process. Debate on these issues within the government is necessary and can be healthy. But public debate on such sensitive issues must have some limits. When it affects national morale and gives comfort to our enemies, it crosses the limits of the acceptable and must be held accountable. We all want more and desire the

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best for the nation's defence preparedness. But we must not allow personal prejudice, selfish interest or frog-in-the-well perspectives to lead us into error, creating doubts in the minds of our own people.

Is India secure?

My answer is yes. India is as secure as the dedicated service of generations of us in the military and civil services and in public life can make her. And this will certainly improve in the future. If there are gaps in our preparedness, they are being addressed and will be filled. No one should be misled by partial revelations or individual views into underestimating this country's capabilities and determination. There is no cause for defeatism or the ill-informed comments recently seen in motivated leaks and stories in the media.

The fact is that the average annual growth of defence capital expenditure during 2001-11 was 12.8 percent. Its share in total defence expenditure has increased from 25 percent in 2000-01 to 40.3 percent in 2010-11. The pace of capital expenditure has also improved over the decade. Since 2002-03, over 97 percent of the revised estimates for the defence capital acquisition budget has been spent each year, and major qualitative enhancements in our defence capabilities are underway.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I said at the outset that fifty years from now, someone will read what I have said and think how wrong I was. I certainly hope that it will be so. If not, it would mean that fifty years from now, our successors will still be facing the same challenges as us! And that would mean that we had failed to deal with these challenges or had been overwhelmed by them. If they have the luxury of thinking how wrong we were, it would mean that we had dealt with the challenges and threats that we know and foresee today, and that life has moved on.

That there will be new threats and challenges is inevitable. How we deal with them is up to us.