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THE MISSING PIECE OF INDIA'S DEFENCE PARADIGM

The White Paper

Joseph Punnen

Edited by: Ishani Sharma

A white paper is a detailed statement describing a new policy direction and providing arguments and evidence in support of it. Such a paper can be applied to any governmental aspects, but it is primarily used in the field of defence, as it involves long-term decisions in the interest of national security and commitment of huge sums of money at times of uncertainty.

According to the Draft Guidelines on Developing National Defense Policy stated by the Organization of American States (OAS), *“A Defense White Paper is a key policy document which provides the Government’s vision for defense. It is a public document which outlines the broad strategic policy framework for defense planning, with a medium term outlook. It is not intended to be re-drafted every year or two, but rather to provide sufficient perspective to enable multi-year budgeting and planning. It should be designed to be flexible enough to take into account minor changes in the security environment. A new White Paper is normally prepared in response to major changes in the strategic environment or to signal important shifts in Government priorities.”*¹

India’s current grand strategy and defence strategy are difficult to assess. Unlike the United States (U.S.), China and many other countries, India does not have a defence paper or national security strategy as such. Nevertheless, it has published certain military doctrines, some of which are easily accessible in the public domain. Not just military doctrines, speeches which act as a basis for some of India’s national interests and strategies are also available. We are living through a moment of decisive change and turbulence with the rise of populism across the world, coupled with the evident decline of globalisation and the current pandemic that the world is suffering from. The state of geopolitics between the states is now similar to what was observed in the 20th Century. Thus, it is imperative for a country to make the right choices in the areas of natural security. India’s former National Security Adviser (NSA), M.K Narayanan, agrees that the country needs a clearly articulated white paper for its defence which sets out its strategic concerns. India is behind the

¹ Permanent Council of the Organization of American States. (2002). DRAFT GUIDELINES ON DEVELOPING NATIONAL DEFENSE POLICY AND DOCTRINE PAPERS ("WHITE PAPERS"). Retrieved from <https://www.oas.org/csh/english/documents/cp10405e04.doc#:~:text=The%20Defense%20White%20Paper%3A%20Essential%20Characteristics&text=It%20should%20be%20designed%20to,important%20shifts%20in%20Government%20priorities.>

U.S., China and Saudi Arabia in terms of its military expenditure. A white paper would ensure that the defence armaments procured are in tune with the country's strategic requirements.

The U.S. has one of the most complex sets of strategic white papers. The National Security Strategy (NSS) of the U.S. provides the basis for the overall security strategy for the nation. Whereas the Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR) outlines the defence strategy, the various other military doctrines also fall under its purview.² Considering the case of China, for many years, it has been producing a Defence White Paper that is made available in several languages, stating its overall strategic aims and objectives. However, in the case of India, according to India's former Chief of the Army Staff, General Deepak Kapoor, New Delhi's security strategy is based on two fundamental principles. Firstly, India follows a policy of "no extraterritorial ambitions" and secondly, it has "no ambitions to transplant" its ideology on others.

There are many reasons as to why a country should publish its defence white paper. During times of uncertainty, it is imperative to have some form of hard data that would very well know its capabilities and in turn, ease decision-making. It is, therefore, especially important in defence for the Government to explicitly set out the evidence and arguments underpinning its defence policy. The biggest concern for a defence chief is the kind of forces that the country requires, along with their financial and strategic implications. The primary purpose of a defence white paper is to, hence, present and explain the Government's decisions about the kinds of military capability that the country requires. In other words, "*A White Paper sets out the Government's analysis of the country's security environment, both domestically and internationally. This may include an assessment of both traditional and non-traditional security threats and factors. The document highlights issues of greatest priority for that country, and provides an overview of how defense policy will be implemented to meet those security challenges. It also describes, in broad terms, current and planned capabilities and roles of the defense forces.*"³

The arguments arising from the defence white paper have to be explicit, evidence-based and contestable, starting with a clear statement of policy aims, fully exploring alternative strategies, stringently comparing the cost effectiveness of competing options, and finally, reaching clear conclusions based on these analyses – all within a disciplined and realistic financial framework. The white paper, along with being an instrument of accountability, provides the governments with an opportunity to apply these standards to defence policy.⁴ All the essential policies and objectives

² Some parts of the white papers and the doctrines are made available in the public domain.

³ Ibid.

⁴ White, H. (2008). The New Defence White Paper: Why We Need It and What It Needs to Do. Retrieved from https://archive.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/pubfiles/White%2C_The_new_defence_white_paper_why_we_need_it_1.pdf

states in the white paper are made in tandem with the resources available with the country. White Papers may contain performance measurements (for example, target dates for the restructuring of the armed forces, or maximum timeframes for deployment of a specific military asset). As a result, this holds the Ministry of Defence and other offices accountable to the stated objectives.

The preparation of a defence white paper, is in fact, a fundamental exercise in democracy. It requires cooperation between the bureaucracy and the military along with consultation with the head of state as well as other political parties. In essence, the white paper provides democratic legitimacy to the national defence policy. Since the white paper is a public document, it explains the role and importance of the armed forces, facilitating the building of a rapport with the public as it is imperative to receive their continued support, so that the government can continue the funding of the defence budget.

“Defense White Papers have also been identified as important confidence- and security-building measures. The preparation and distribution of White Papers increase transparency not only in the domestic context, but also internationally. Consultation with allies, neighbors and regional and other international partners who may be affected by the White Paper policy is especially important in terms of ensuring that a country’s intentions are not misinterpreted. Sharing of White Papers also encourages a constructive policy dialogue on changes in the security environment and the assessment of traditional and non-traditional threats, as well as on evolving trends in defense policy and planning among military officers and defense officials from different nations.”⁵

UPCOMING DEFENCE DEALS

A white paper would allow us to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the upcoming defence deals and their necessity. The MH-60 Romeo Helicopters deal was finally sealed in February 2020, during President Trump’s visit to India. The \$2.6 billion deal between India and the US includes helicopter, communication systems, weapons systems, eight anti-surface Hellfire Missiles, MK 54 Lightweight Torpedoes, 50 cannons and precision rocket systems. During the DefExpo 2020, India and Russia signed 14 MoUs (Memorandum of Understanding), which includes the supply of S-400 air defence systems and the production of Kalashnikov rifles and Kamov helicopters. India has already made the payment of the first tranche in 2019 for five S-400 systems. The deal is worth approximately \$5.4 billion. The Government of India has signed a Rs 1,500 crore deal with Russia

⁵ White, H. (2008). The New Defence White Paper: Why We Need It and What It Needs to Do. Retrieved from [https://archive.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/pubfiles/White%2C The new defence white paper why we need it 1.pdf](https://archive.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/pubfiles/White%2C%20The%20new%20defence%20white%20paper%20why%20we%20need%20it%201.pdf)

to procure R-27 air-to-air missiles to be equipped on the Su-30MKI combat aircraft. This deal will boost India's capabilities beyond visual range warfare.⁶

Given India's ever-rising global profile, with its opponents right by its borders, India has to be prepared for any worst-case scenarios. Thus, to supplement such scenarios, it is a necessity that we have a defence white paper which is well articulated on India's defence needs. Without the defence white paper, we sometimes lack clarity and are restricted in scope as to determine the challenges posed by India's adversaries like Pakistan and China. Many political and defence establishments contend that India can defeat Pakistan in all fronts, even if it is a "weak Pakistan with nuclear capabilities". However, in reality that may not be the case as anything is possible. So, this is where a defence white paper comes into play, as it is able to explain the true nature of the threat posed by Pakistan to the public, and as to why India is certain of containing the Pakistani threat.

THE CASE OF CHINA

In the case of China, we cannot compare with the statistics of Pakistan as competing with China, in terms of economy, strategy and military, is an entirely different matter. Meanwhile, Pakistan and China have formed sort of an alliance⁷ to keep India at bay and, therefore, the nature of the threat posed by China to India is a very difficult task that has to be undertaken with caution. China, under the helm of President Xi Jinping, desires to be a great power and this may come at the cost of India's national security. There are cases of ambiguity regarding China's next move in the regions around the Indo-Pacific and Asia in general which calls for an 'in-depth analysis' of China's motives. It would be interesting to see that in a Sino-centric world order, would India be at par or be with other countries who play secondary roles.

China has been promoting its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with an aim to bring itself closer to other countries and put itself at the center of the world. Many of the BRI projects have been completed (however, due to the current pandemic, some of the projects have been stalled) and China has been able to expand its interests via these projects. This does not, however, necessarily mean that China is preparing to confront individual countries in Asia, such as India, which do not subscribe to the BRI. In this case, according to M.K. Narayanan, "*A defence white paper would provide a more definitive answer to such issues. A detailed exercise to assess whether China is*

⁶ Josh, J. (2020). List of 10 latest defence deals of India 2020. Retrieved September 22, 2020, from <https://www.defencenews.in/article/List-of-10-latest-defence-deals-of-India-2020-861470>

⁷ PTI, P. (2020, May 21). China says its ties with Pakistan remains 'firm as a rock'. Retrieved September 23, 2020, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/china-says-its-ties-with-pakistan-remains-firm-as-a-rock/articleshow/75871619.cms>

indeed a threat, rather than a challenge, to India should prove invaluable. It is possible that a detailed study may indicate that China understands that there are limits to its strength and capabilities. Several instances of late, have shown the frailties in China's policies — Hong Kong, Taiwan, and even Xinjiang are instances that indicate that China has its own Achilles heel. Consequently, China may not be ready, for quite some time at least, to seek a direct confrontation with India.”⁸

Upon closer analysis with China's defence white paper, it is found that China is inclined towards influencing other countries via economic means rather than involving themselves in a state of conflict beyond the prescribed areas. As opposed to this, India could publish its own version of the defence white paper by espousing China's stance, in spite of the border tensions between the two and, thus, the two countries could come to an agreement regarding the respective areas of influence. India worries about the rising Chinese influence on its own spheres of influence in Afghanistan, West Asia and other parts of South Asia. As rightly worded by M.K. Narayanan, *“The defence white paper might well provide a strategic paradigm, in which India and China agree to peacefully co-exist in many areas, leaving aside conflict zones of critical importance to either, thus ensuring a more durable peace between them.”⁹*

In order for the White Paper to succeed, the Government must produce a document that identifies its achievable strategic objectives, produces an evidence-based argument for the cost-effective operational options and the resulting capabilities required to achieve such goals and to ensure long-term funding to deliver them. It should discuss the broader implications required to achieve those choices it has made for India's strategic need and national security especially at times like these. Its judgements will not assume that the world will not stay as it is today. If the White Paper is planned like this, there is a huge chance that it will benefit the public, the military and the government.

⁸ Narayanan, M.K. (2020, February 20). The missing piece in India's defence jigsaw puzzle. Retrieved September 24, 2020, from <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-missing-piece-in-indias-defence-jigsaw-puzzle/article30863880.ece>

⁹ Ibid