

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CAPABILITY PLANNING FOR THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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This Project is currently under consideration to be published as a book.

Having its roots in defence and military planning of Australia, US and UK, capability-based planning is an approach that is focused on aligning resources and changes in structure to meet overarching strategic objectives. Capability planning provides a relatively novel approach that can help push India into an era of forward looking and flexible planning based on key capabilities of allies and rivals and changing international security regimes. In this policy series, we understand what capability-based planning is and how it could contribute to streamlining India's ad-hoc planning culture. In doing so, this capability planning framework for the Indian Armed Forces aims to expound on this approach that is centred around identifying and developing capability priorities by assessing the resources available and how they can be allocated and deployed to optimize outcomes in conjunction with strategic objectives envisaged by the state.

The implementation of capability planning has been studied in the context of an Indian strategic planning system that lacks a clear, overt signs of strategic thinking and planning. India has developed strategic concepts but in a manner that lacks structure and formality, thereby underlining the need to redefine the contours of India's national security strategy through the incorporation of a capability-based planning approach. To compound on the same, this publication discussed how India's national security strategy must be formulated and the aspects it must incorporate. This is to be designed in accordance with India's geopolitical scenario, territorial integrity, and national sovereignty. It is conceived by working in conjunction with the intricacies of strategic culture in India.

The strategic culture aligns with capability planning through the identification, acquisition, allocation, and mobilization of the various components of comprehensive national power and their alignment towards achieving the national security objectives of the state. Through a document analysis, key insights have been gained from the capability plans of Australia and NATO. The Australian and NATO examples have highlighted the importance of a synchronized, "all of government" approach to capability planning and the formulation of a thorough and viable national security strategy that relies on a deep understanding of the international space and state priorities. Thus, this further helps in learning which elements can be replicated in the context of India after a thorough investigation of its strategic planning history and culture.

Taking a page from the Australian and NATO examples, the policy brief has adopted a scenario-based approach to understanding capabilities that simultaneously identifies India's national security priorities, and gauges existing capabilities in each field. India's security establishment

has to deal with and build capability for a multitude of different security challenges. The ones explored under the banner of the brief are – land and sea border management, naval security, counterinsurgency capabilities, counterterrorism and sub-conventional warfare capabilities, psychological and information warfare, and chemical biological radiological and nuclear warfare capabilities. In the ongoing pandemic and the geopolitical developments of the past year, two of these challenges have gained particular significance. The first is that of counterterrorism and sub-conventional warfare capabilities. CBRN threats, including threats posed by black-swan events like COVID-19 whose origins remain a mystery, and emerging technologies, the debate around which has only gotten more vociferous particularly insofar as it relates to China, are of significance. These threats operate against the larger backdrop of the two-front challenge India has long had on its long land and sea borders, as well as internal security threats in the form of insurgencies against which India has to keep shoring up its capacity.

The document finds that that constant modernization is necessary along all these axes to keep operations not only viable with the rapid pace technological advancements, but also to create a leaner, meaner, and more cost-efficient force. With an eye to the future, it seems that CBRN events pose significant threats to human health and security. Capability planning for these is difficult given their potential for destruction. There is also considerable ambiguity that surrounds some of the biological and radiological agents which have other, more benign uses. India's existing response to these threats has involved specialized training for security personnel, and the development of protective equipment and gear to provide a modicum of protection against CBRN events. India also imports equipment from allied countries such as the United States. India does, however, need to allocate great focus on CBRN oriented capability roadmap going forward, not least because its neighborhood poses an immediate threat in this regard. India's vast borders provide a diverse range of terrains and associated capabilities. With two significant rivals, Pakistan and China, occupying two disputed borders, India's conventional security challenges continue to be potent. India must look to modernize border security and its conventional and non-conventional weaponry, as both rivals do the same at a much faster pace. These advancements will also contribute to counter-terrorism efforts.

In addition to equipping Indian security forces with better tools, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency must both refocus attention towards changing ideological narratives in sensitive socio-political spaces. Reorienting parts of the counterinsurgency efforts towards more development centric projects is one important step that is detailed in the full brief. Here, the tools of information and psychological warfare become an important part of the analysis. Particularly, counter-insurgency strategy must modernize and diversify to be able to adequately fight back against the war of narratives that often occurs between state and insurgent forces. Finally, naval security is arguably India's strongest suit, and the Indian navy has also been relatively more consistent with its modernization. Yet, the smooth procurement of systems continues to face significant challenges. This is more broadly a challenge with the other two branches of the Indian Armed Forces as well. A combination of investment into modernization and new and emerging forms of warfare (like information and psychological warfare) will benefit India in the medium to long term across its various security spheres.

Capability planning for India's security and defence forces, however, cannot be furthered without identifying the obstacles in optimized administration of forces. The work goes in depth to decipher the factors that lead to underperforming Indian defence forces. The brief discusses

the budget constraints, inefficient budget allocation and monetary bottlenecks in defence forces. Ad-hocism, or panic buying which was one flavour of COVID-19 pandemic too, and its detrimental effects are also addressed and role of underwhelming domestic research in worsening it further. Issues regarding external procurement and domestic production will be critically analysed. For instance, if external partners are well diversified or not and how well-prepared the domestic industry is to protect national interests of India in defence research development. The systematic problems are not only bureaucratic and monetary, but there are issues pertaining to coordination and training of three forces as well which this work delves into in greater detail. This includes hurdles in holding joint training exercises that sabotages India's ability to perform in all three forms equally. While training standards remain stagnant, the troop strength also remains out of proportion further sabotaging joint military exercises as well. Thus, the work discusses troop strength and tooth-to-tail ratio in Indian defence.

A key, and novel, contribution of this policy brief has also been to delve into the world of emerging and futuristic technologies in relations to the significance they may hold towards India's national security. One significant threat, which has only grown more potent during the pandemic, is that of technologies linked to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. India's capability planning in this regard needs to take a long-term view, given that the same technologies which pose a threat to India's national security will need to be harnessed for their offensive and defensive capabilities. These include, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, robotics etc. that will dramatically transform the nature of warfare as we know it and are already being put into practice. The changing technologies will also alter the operational environment with newer domains such as the outer space gaining currency as domains of warfare or any rate, contestation. Already, it is evident that the great powers are beginning to clash over the question of responsible exploration of outer space. Emerging technologies such as AI can be put to use in both, conventional and sub conventional forms of warfare making it important for India to invest in building capacity in these areas. Autonomous systems such as unmanned vehicles are already being used by non-state actors and India is already beginning to see their use among insurgent groups.

On the frontier of capability planning in this area, India is considerably behind many of the other great-power and even smaller powers such as Israel. While there have been calls for the Indian armed forces to invest in disruptive technologies, a lot of work needs to go into even the conventional domains of security. India cannot compete with the US, China and Russia and may be not able to do so for a while. However, a calibrated response to capability assessment, planning and development will ensure that India is able to muster some form deterrence. Already, there are fears that India's critical infrastructure may have been compromised during the last standoff with China. In the short term, India has made certain targeted investments in emerging technologies. However, a long-term investment in STEM training and encouraging innovation and domain-level expertise remains the need of the hour.

Drastic changes in India's defence planning mechanisms must be systematically executed at various levels of government to reduce ad-hocism and encourage the formulation and presentation of a cohesive national security strategy. While investigating the contours of a thorough national security strategy is not in the mandate of this piece, it nonetheless remains a crucial precursor to any good planning exercise. As for the contents of this paper, they have been accompanied by detailed recommendations as to how India might work towards better planning objectives in each arena. It is through this meticulous investigation of the most crucial

security threats, India's associated capabilities, and recommendations, that this brief contributes towards larger efforts to transform India's national security establishment for the better.