A Vote On National Security

(This editorial is based on the article <u>"A Vote On National Security"</u> which appeared in "The Indian Express" on 15th March 2019. The article talks about recent attacks on Indian soil and the need for a comprehensive policy on national security.)

In the wake of Pulwama and Balakot attack, national security has become major public preoccupation. It becomes important to draw attention to persistent loopholes in our governance systems, and the continued failure to address serious gaps identified by expert committees.

The nation has also suffered from a lack of accountability apparent in the recent failure of acting upon the available Intel on terrorist attacks.

Thus making it incumbent upon the government to acknowledge India's national security challenges and its various dimensions and design practical steps to make our nation safe from external and domestic threats.

Framework to Deal with Security Threats

- **India formed a National Security Council (NSC) in 1999, where all aspects of national security are deliberated upon by it. NSC acts as the apex body, headed by the Prime Minister.**
- The Ministers of Home Affairs, Defence, External Affairs and Finance are its members and the National Security Adviser acts as its Secretary.
- **NSC comprises of the three tier structure- Strategic Policy Group (SPG), the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and the National Security Council Secretariat.**
- The SPG chaired by the Cabinet Secretary is the principal forum for inter-ministerial coordination and integration of the relevant inputs. The NSAB undertakes long-term analysis and provides perspectives on issues of national security.

Challenges Faced by India

The world is changing very fast which has resulted in new security challenges. In the absence of a coherent strategy, the government's responses are often responsive in nature and partial which can prove costly at times and can inflict further damage in times to come.

India has one of the lowest police to population ratios at 125 per 1, 00,000. At the ground level, there is virtually no policing of the kind which is trained at repelling any form of coordinated terrorists or moist attack.

India suffers from regular smuggling from across the sea and land borders which remain an open secret. Terrorists slip through using these smuggling routes often relying upon corrupted elements in security forces.

Any security system is as good and efficient as its junior-most foot soldier. The recruitment of police personnel at these levels is plagued by corrupt practices. They lack basic training. Some, being virtually illiterate, are not even trainable.

There is inordinate stress on the personal security of political personages and senior officials at the expense of public security. This not only acts against the spirit of democracy and egalitarian society, but also impacts adversely on the state's ability to ensure public security and law and order without which terrorist threats cannot be addressed.

The Need for Policy on Nation Security

Despite India having a national security council since 1999, it lacks a comprehensive coordinated policy on national security.

India suffers from the crucial issue of coordination required to formulate and address the issues of national security in the absence of political consensus in the country on national security issues as how to treat challenges from Pakistan and China.

There are **multiple departments looking at security and intelligence interests and it becomes difficult to synchronise them**. There is no common understanding among various segments of the government of what national security constitutes.

Issues related to national security can only be addressed through efficient and accountable institutions and not through individual bravery or brilliance.

Citizens have the right to hold their political leaders and governing institutions accountable and that is only possible if there is transparency mandated by law, not left to the discretion of a government requiring a clearly stated policy.

Voices for Changes

- **Kargil Review Committee**
    - The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) was set up by the Government of India on 29 July 1999, after the Indian Army announced complete eviction of Pakistani intruders from Kargil, officially bringing the Kargil War to an end.
    - The committee was set up to examine the sequence of events and make recommendations for the future.
    - The committee pointed out loopholes in Intelligence, Counter-terrorist operations, Border Management, Defence Budget and Modernisation, National Security Management and Apex Decision Making.
- **Naresh Chandra Task Force**
    - In 2011, Government of India announced setting up a high-powered task force.
    - It was directed to review the defence management in the country and make suggestions for implementation of major defence projects.
    - The task force was mandated to review the implementations of Kargil Review Committee's recommendation.
    - It observed that the linkages between the ministry of external affairs and the Ministry of Defence "were untouched", and "deficiencies remain in critical areas of defence procurement".

Way Forward

There is a **need to create a policy which should be based on clearly spelling out the real trade-off between security and the space to enjoy democratic values** and fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.

A national security doctrine will make sense only if it is placed in the framework of India's Constitution and conveys a sense of where India wishes to be as a country and society in the coming future.

It is important to update the reports of the Kargil Review Committee and the Naresh Chandra Task Force on National Security. The reports not only contain a diagnosis of our national security challenge but valuable recommendations to address it.

In order to realise the dream of a robust and secure nation, the government needs to draw lessons from past successes and failures and avoid ad hoc responses and instead create a strong national security policy.