

IMPACT OF GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS ON NATIONAL SECURITY AND STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT OF INDIA

Rajkumar Mehla

Associate Professor of Geography, Govt. College, Hisar

Abstract

Geography is most important element in strategic thinking and is an important source to explain strategic environment. There are many misconceptions about India's strategic culture, perhaps because it has not been clearly articulated and its security environment is relatively uncertain. India has both continental and maritime boundaries. Its geography offers a number of explanations to its parochial nature, sense of civilization and destiny. As the country did not come into existence with clearly demarcated borders on Independence, its reliance on its frontiers being citadel for defence and security has proved false. A deeper understanding of the nature of terrain along its borders is necessary. India's maritime heritage and responsibilities are also based on its geographic location. While geography remains unchanging, it is the shape of human behavior that has changed geo-political equations.

National Security

National security is the requirement to maintain the survival of the nation-state through the use of economic, military and political power and the exercise of diplomacy. The concept developed mostly in the USA after World War II. Initially focusing on military might, it now comprehends a broad range of facets, all of which go against the rules of the military or economic security of the nation and the values settled by the national society. Accordingly, in order to possess national security, a nation needs to possess economic security, energy security, environmental security etc. Security threats involve not only conventional opposition such as nation states but also non-state actors such as terrorist organizations, narcotic cartels and multi-national organizations but some authorities including natural disasters and events causing severe environmental damage is also included in this category.

There is no single universally accepted definition of "National Security". A typical dictionary definition, in this case from the **Macmillan Dictionary** emphasizes the overall security of a nation and a nation state. *"The protection or the safety of a country's secrets and its citizens."*

However, a variety of definitions provide an overview of the many usages of this concept. The concept still remains ambiguous, having originated from simpler definitions which initially emphasized the freedom from military threats and political compulsion to later increase in sophistication and include other forms of non-military security as suited the circumstances of the time.

Walter Lippmann gave one of the early definitions in 1943 in terms of a nation and war, *"A nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by war."*

A later definition by **Harold Lasswell**, a political scientist, in 1950, looks at national security from almost the same aspect, that of external coercion, *"The distinctive meaning of national security means freedom from foreign dictation."*

The 1996 definition propagated by the **National Defence College of India** resembles the accretion of the elements of National Power, *"National security is an appropriate and aggressive blend of political resilience and maturity, human resources, economic structure and capacity, technological competence, industrial base and*

availability of natural resources and finally the military might."

Harold Brown, US Secretary of Defense from 1977 to 1981 in the Carter Administration, defined national security in his 1983 book *Thinking about national security: defense and foreign policy in a dangerous world*. The definition includes elements such as economic security and environmental security, *"National security then is the ability to preserve the nation's physical integrity and territory; to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world on reasonable terms; to preserve its nature, institution, and governance from disruption from outside; and to control its borders."*

In 2010, **Barack Obama** included an all-encompassing world view in his definition of America's National Security interests as : *The security of the United States, its citizens and U.S. allies and partners; A strong, innovative, and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity; Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and An international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.*

Introduction

Power and national security are fundamentally based on Geographical factors. The significance of geography, climate and resources is a key element in strategic thinking and remains an important source of strategic culture. Geographical circumstances are the most important factors to understanding why some countries adopt particular strategic policies rather than others. Deeply embedded thoughts related to Indian geography powerfully regulate the shaping of strategic thinking of this sub-continent.

Geography affects strategic and operational planning, tactics, logistics, operations, relations with civilian populations, and the military evaluations of areas. Geography is not itself an element of national power, which is normally described as having political, economic, and military elements. Geography is better viewed as the foundation on which these three elements of national power are built. Although knowledge of a broad range of Geographical factors is necessary in order to effectively maintain the elements of national power in quest of national interests. Any believable military

response to a regional conflict requires an understanding of the Geography of that region, as geographic conditions may enhance or constrain the exercise of military power. **“Military operations are drastically affected by many circumstances, one of the most important of which is the geography of the region.”** Geographical factors in the context of changing political scenarios exert their own influence on the making of strategic policy.

Strategic culture of a nation is the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses and patterns of habitual behavior of its national strategic community. It is underlined by continuity of thought amongst individuals as well as by administrations within a country. It is often said that there is a deficiency of strategic culture in India. This view is especially prevalent amongst the Western analysts, and needs to be corrected. There is always a considered principal for the manner in which a nation acts.

India's extraordinary history is intimately fastened to its Geography. At a focal point in the Asian landmass, it has always been an invader's paradise, while, at the same time, its natural isolation from the rest of Asia allowed it to adapt to, and absorb, many of the people who entered the subcontinent. No matter how many Persians, Greeks, Mongols, Arabs, Portuguese, British and other peoples came to despoil, trade or rule, India has survived their depredations. India has always been simply too big, too complicated, and too culturally strong to let any single empire or constituency dominate it for long. In any case, history has a different attitude depending on who has recorded it. India's national security environment is determined by a complex interplay of its Geographical attributes, Historical Legacy, and Socio-Economic circumstances as well as regional and global developments.

Overview

India's National Security Environment is determined by its Geographical attributes, Historical Legacy, Socio-Economic circumstances as well as regional and global developments. India is the seventh largest country in the world with an area of 3.2 million square kilometers, a land boundary of 15000 kms, peninsular coastline of 7700 kms, 600 island territories and an Exclusive Economic Zone of 2.5 million sq. km. Island territories in the east are 1300 kms. India shares its land boundaries with six countries like Bangladesh (4339 kms.); China (3439 kms.); Pakistan (3325 kms.); Myanmar (1380 Kms.); Nepal and Bhutan and maritime boundaries with seven countries like Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The Indian subcontinent is the southern geo-political region of Asia comprising territories which geo-physically lie on the Indian Plate (bordered on the north by the Eurasian Plate) and are south of the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush mountain ranges. It is surrounded (from west to east) by Western Asia, Central Asia, Eastern Asia, and Southeast Asia. This vast and natural entity has the Arabian Sea on its west, the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea to its east and the Indian Ocean to the south. Its area of over 4.5 million sq. km is home to one-fourth of the world's population. It now comprises the independent countries of Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. India is by far the largest entity and shares

borders with the other four, none of whom share borders amongst each other. Non-contiguous to the mainland are the Lakshadweep Islands in the Arabian Sea and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands located 1,300 km from the mainland in the Bay of Bengal.

Indian territorial borders were settled by adjudication but later have been forged through conflict and are still contested. India shares common borders with Pakistan (3,323 km; the Jammu and Kashmir border is 1,085 km), China (Line of Actual Control is 3,488 km), Bhutan (699 km), Nepal (1,751 km), Myanmar (1,643 km), and Bangladesh (4,096.7 km). Although India and Sri Lanka do not share a land boundary, the narrowest distance between the two countries is only 64 km across the Palk Strait. Most of Jammu and Kashmir is contested with Pakistan, and the Aksai Chin area of Jammu and Kashmir is disputed with China, as is the border of Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India. Nepal claims a 75 sq. km area called Kalapani. Possession of the recently emerged New Moore Island (South Talpatty) in the Bay of Bengal has been disputed by Bangladesh, and much of the border with Bangladesh is not demarcated.

India shares maritime borders with five countries. Its total coastline is 7,516 km in length, comprising 5,422 km for the mainland, 132 km for the Lakshadweep Islands, and 1,962 km for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Indian peninsula juts 1,980 km into the Indian Ocean. Fifty percent of the Indian Ocean basin lies within a 1,500 km radius of India, a reality that has strategic implications. Under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, India has a 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), a 12 nautical mile territorial sea, a 24 nautical mile contiguous zone, and a legal continental shelf extending to a depth of 2,500 meters or to the end of the continental margin. India has 1,197 islands in the Indian Ocean. (572 in the Andaman and Nicobar – 38 of which are inhabited – and 23 in the Lakshadweep – 10 of which are inhabited. In addition, there are 447 islands off the western coast and 151 islands off the eastern coast).

While India is considered as one entity, when viewed physically against the backdrop of Asia, it is physically separated from the rest of Asia by high mountain ranges. India has three main geological regions, the Indo-Gangetic Plain and the Himalayas—collectively known as North India—and the Peninsula, or South India. Geographically, India is divided by the Vindhya ranges into north and south (or peninsular) India. India has diverse regions that include highlands, plains, deserts, and river valleys. The country's highest elevation is 8,598 metres at Kanchenjunga, which is the third highest mountain in the world and located in the Himalayas. The Gangetic plain and the rivers of the Punjab irrigate the fertile soil making it a rich agricultural region, which has attracted invaders through the millennia. India has approximately 14,500 km of inland waterways, but their transportation potential is vastly underused.

The exact number of ethnic groups in India depends on the source and method of counting. Only the continent of Africa exceeds the linguistic, cultural, and genetic diversity of India: 72 percent of the population is Indo-Aryan, 25 percent Dravidian, and 3 percent Mongoloid and other. Each of these groups can be further sub-

divided into numerous combinations of language, religion, and caste.

The total number of languages and dialects varies by the source and counting method, and many Indians speak more than one language. The census lists 114 languages (22 of which are spoken by one million or more persons) that are further categorized into 216 dialects or "mother tongues" spoken by 10,000 or more speakers. An estimated 850 languages are in daily use, and there are more than 1,600 dialects. Hindi is the official language and the most commonly spoken, but not all dialects are mutually comprehensible. English has official status and is widely used.

In India about 80.5 percent of the population is Hindu, 13.4 percent Muslim, 2.3 percent Christian, 1.9 percent Sikh, 0.8 percent Buddhist, and 0.4 percent Jain; another 0.6 percent belongs to other faiths, such as Zoroastrianism and numerous religions associated with Scheduled Tribes. The Indian Constitution confers religious freedom for individuals and prohibits religious discrimination, but in spite of this, there have been enduring tensions among religious communities, most notably between Hindus and Muslims.

Conclusion

Geography has deeply affected India's history and insular outlook, and, therefore, its strategic culture. India's strategic location, size and large population have contributed to its importance, its distinction in the Indian Ocean Region and its global relevance. Its geographic barriers have contributed to its insular conception, allowing India to develop its own unique culture. Historically, it has developed through a northwest population flow till the 18th century. It has the great advantage of being a compact landmass, with a large unintended coastline. It has evolved with the development of river basin civilizations. Xenophobia has never been a part of India's culture, but its experience of colonization has made it wary of foreign influences and interventions. Yet, India is a spiritual culture that has the ability to bring others into its fold.

The major geographic problem that India faces, at present, is its ill-defined borders. Like most boundary disputes, those of India with its neighbors are symptomatic of wider bilateral relations. India is larger than all its immediate neighbors in South Asia taken together, giving rise to insecurity and a feeling of being dominated in them. Boundaries are manifestations of national identity. They can also be trip-wires of war.

Effective border management is now, and should always be, a primary national security priority.

Geographic conditions may influence or constrain the exercise of military power. The larger the area under consideration and the longer the time period involved, the more extensive does the problem become. The realities of military geography and national diplomacy tend to be summarized in the geo-political attitudes and objectives of a nation. India has a vision of South Asia as an integrated and single entity. It is based on the fact that although South Asia is divided by political boundaries, the region forms a single geographical and economic unit. It occupies a shared cultural space and a shared cultural legacy.

References

1. Alesina, Alberto, and Enrico Spolaore (1997). "On the Number and Size of Nations," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112:4, pp. 1027-1056.
2. Alvarez, R. R., Jr. (1995). "The Mexican-U.S. Border: The Making of anthropology of Borderlands. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, pp. 447-470.
3. Anderson, Benedict (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
4. Anderson, James E. (1979). "A Theoretical Foundation for the Gravity Equation," *The American Economic Review*, 69:1 (March), pp. 106-116.
5. Baybeck, B. (2006). "Sorting out the Competing Effects of Racial Context," *Journal of Politics* 68:2, pp. 386-396.
6. Government of India, *India's Maritime Strategy* (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, 2006).
7. Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes, while inaugurating the two-day seminar on "Maritime Dimensions of India's Security" on 05 and 06 January 2001 in New Delhi.
8. Rahul Roy Chowdhury, *India's Maritime Security* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2000)
9. See Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy, Selected Speeches, September 1946 - April 1961*, (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1961), pp. 132-81.
10. W Gordon East, *The Geography Behind History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), p. 182.