

# MISSING: NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

As per my assessment, it has been nearly seven weeks since the latest national security crisis began with multiple Chinese intrusions across the LAC at Galwan River, Hot Springs, [Pangong Tso](#) in Eastern Ladakh and Naku La in North Sikkim. The MEA has made three perfunctory statements about the diplomatic and military engagements to defuse the situation. No formal statement has been made on the military situation at the sites of the intrusions or along the rest of the LAC. However, on June 13, the Chief of Army Staff while talking to the press said, “We are disengaging in a phased manner, we have started from the north from the Galwan river valley where a lot of disengagement has happened.”

The media has reported verbatim what has been fed by “reliable government/military sources”. The intrusions have come to light due to the efforts of a handful of defence analysts and journalists who still have a conscience and leaks by “soldier journalists”, driven by bravado.

Over the last seven years — Depsang 2013, Chumar 2014, Doklam 2017 and now Eastern Ladakh 2020 — we have followed a familiar pattern to resolve national security crises due to the undemarcated LAC and the ever-shifting Chinese claim lines. The Chinese actions catch us by surprise, both at the strategic and the tactical level; we react post-haste with a much higher force level; the exact place and the extent of intrusion is never formally acknowledged; the outcomes of the military and diplomatic engagements and concessions meted out are not put out in public domain; and, disengagement happens. Then, we repeat the entire process when the next crisis occurs.

The jury is still out on the final outcome of the crisis. The primary concern of the government in such a crisis that portends possible loss of territory is its fallout on domestic politics. More so, when national security and territorial integrity are the core ideological values of the party in power. Denial and obfuscation by peddling the logic of “differing perceptions” is the escape route which virtually endorses [China](#)’s stand — that the PLA is operating in its own area and it is India that is interfering with its patrols

Instead of calling China the initiator and aggressor of the crisis, we create ambiguity in the minds of the public and the international community. This approach also misleads the nation about our military capabilities. The reality is that the asymmetry with respect to military capability is in favour of China. We negotiate from a position of weakness, and hence concessions given are a cause of bigger worry.

The logical approach to national security must begin with a strategic review to establish what the present and future security challenges, both internal and external are, to evolve a comprehensive national security strategy. This must be formalised and put under parliamentary scrutiny. Unclassified aspects must be in the public domain so that in any crisis, it is generally known as to how the government will act.

The national security strategy is the starting point for all security planning because it formally spells out the vision to tackle the threats faced. and leads to the acquiring of much-needed capabilities. No Indian government has, so far, spelt out a clear national security strategy: The capabilities are more tailored to fight the last war and not future wars. The Defence Planning Committee has had the mandate to formalise a national security strategy since 2018, but little seems to have been done.

The national security strategy spells out the capabilities required in terms of force levels, technology and structures. The military works out the details, and after approving them, the government allocates the financial resources. Also, from the national security strategy flows the joint military strategy.

What we have is a functional approach, wherein we have created a military more suited to fight the wars of the last century, and with incremental changes, we are desperately trying to adapt it to fight high technology-driven short-duration wars of the 21st-century. Moreover, in the absence of political guidance in the national security strategy, the military is always looking over its shoulders during a crisis.

Now, we are faced with an enemy at our gates, who, in the last three decades, has followed the logical approach towards national security and transformed its military, and is prepared to use the same to pursue its policy. It has started the current border incidents to assert its hegemony over India, and enforce a status quo with respect to border infrastructure on its own terms.

The violence on the LAC is an ominous warning for the government to review its approach towards handling the current crisis. This crisis has to be managed without losing any territory, and more importantly, without losing our prestige. As a first step, we must delink national security from domestic politics. The onus for this is on the government.

The government must take the Opposition, Parliament, the media and the public into confidence, and apply the security principle of need-to-know. They must explain the reality on the ground so that the nation can present a united front. Our military has the capability to stalemate the PLA which is defeat for China.

***The writer, a retired lieutenant general, was GOC-in-C of Northern Command***

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