

HOW SAFE IS THE NATION?

Book Review

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How secure is a nation is not an easy question to answer at the best of times. Determining this in India's case, with its size, diversity and ever-increasing global interests, is a complex exercise. Security also means many things to many people. As this book states, there is at present no prospect of war between major powers. Nevertheless, the major issues of discord between the U.S. and Russia, or between the U.S. and China are centred round military issues. The expansion of the NATO to the frontiers of Russia or the deployment of missile defences in former Soviet states is a major point of discord which the recent Putin-Bush summit failed to resolve. China's legitimate concerns of the U.S.'s muscular military presence in the East Asian waters, and policies which lead to an arms race in space are major global security concerns.

Security perspectives

Indian security concerns are of a different order and scope. India remains the dominant power in South Asia and faces no major threat from any in its neighbourhood. Its economy, military capabilities, industrial capacity and resources make it secure against all the traditional patterns of threat. Yet, India is insecure in its ability to meet the threats of terrorism and internal security dangers posed by the phenomena of Naxalism. The conflicts in J&K and in the North-East continue to drain both the resources and energies of Indian leadership. There are other transnational threats of pandemics, HIV and migrations from which there can never be complete security. The volume contains some introspective essays on the Indian security perspectives. Now the Vice-President, Hamid Ansari writes with his hallmark precision and clarity on the situation in Iran and Afghanistan. Analysing the Iran situation, the author makes the point that Israel

has successfully framed its conflict with Iran as one between a democracy and an illiberal theology. The U.S. in turn, looking at Iran through the Israeli prism, refuses to negotiate with Iran, and has failed to evolve a new equation in the region. On Pakistan, Ansari makes the telling observation that 9/11 changed Pakistan's behaviour but not its interests in Afghanistan or the Taliban.

Education and security

Another valuable contribution is on education and national security. This is a rare exploration of the relationship between the two by P.V. Indiresan. This fine essay examines the essential need for technology quotients of a country being kept at high levels through education to ensure national security. There are excellent examples given of the U.S., and even more importantly of Indian instances, which corroborate the author's prescient observations. The public discourse on education which is mired wholly in issues of social justice needs to be raised to address the question of quality in the higher echelons' education impacting on research and innovation to obtain security.

India's National Security 2007 is the seventh review in the series. Its contents have been improved over the years and the current edition merits attention by the inclusion of a National Security Index. This index places India at the 5th position amongst the top 50 countries. The methodology adopted is a departure from the earlier ranking yardsticks which look either at economic power alone as a measure of security, or, at military hardware as its sole determinant. The book's index also reckons with the adult literacy levels in the population between 15 and 64 years of age. Even in military capability, the index looks not merely at the numbers but the quality of armed equipment in military forces. It is therefore informative to learn that with the rigorous yardsticks applied, China remains ahead of India.

Security index

The National Security Index is based on assessments of economic strength, defence capability, energy security, technology and effective population in 50 countries. The Chinese have in the last decade laid greater emphasis on Comprehensive National Power, based on a more pragmatic set of parameters. The well-recognised measure of Human Development Index does not however form part of the analysis in the book. Indeed, by applying the Chinese parameters, India would figure still lower. This security ranking exercise raises important questions. The rankings in the book seem to bear no relation to the real security

status of these states. India is ranked 5th in the national security index amongst 50 states, while the U.K., Germany and France are at the 9th, 10th and the 11th. Sweden is at the 14th, Brazil at the 30th and Pakistan is ranked at the 31st. The reality of these states' security or insecurity is far removed from that indicated in the book. These rankings do not also help in formulating security policy and plans for the future. It is hoped that a more realistic security ranking of states can be presented in the next volume of the series.