

# **NATIONAL POWER AND GRAND STRATEGY**

**By**

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## **Introduction**

The international system as we know it today is an interplay of national power of different nations. This can be felt in the emerging world order. There has been a perceptible change, particularly during the last two decades, in the manner the nation states conduct international relations. Military alliances have given way to multilateral groupings, understandings and strategic partnerships. Nations are becoming increasingly aware of the power or influence that they wield vis-à-vis other nations. Countries are beginning to study the elements that go into determining national power (comprehensive national power [CNP] in case of China), and India is no exception. Similarly, they are also looking at the ways and means to use this national power to secure their vital interests, and that is best done by evolving a long-term perspective. When evolved at the highest level, it takes the form of a grand strategy.

It is, therefore, important to understand the essentials of national power and grand strategy, as also their inter-se relationship to grasp the intellectual process involved in strategy formulation. This essay covers the following:

- a) National power.
- b) Grand strategy and strategy hierarchy.
- c) Inter-se relationship between national power and the grand strategy.

## **NATIONAL POWER**

### **Perception of National Power**

During the 1960s and '70s, most theorists doing research on international relations avoided dealing with the phenomenon of power. National power was considered synonymous with military power. This would explain to a great extent the superpower status of the erstwhile Soviet Union and its unexpected disintegration. Since then, the perception of national power has undergone a change. The Chinese call it comprehensive national power, or CNP. It is nothing but power viewed

comprehensively. Let us examine a few questions— what are the components or elements of national power as we know it today? What are the factors that make for the power of a nation vis-à-vis other nations? There are two types of elements that make national power, tangibles and intangibles.

### **Tangibles, or Relatively Stable Factors**

**Geography.** The geography of a country (for example, a continent, an island nation, a land-locked country or a peninsula) and the size of its territory have considerable importance as a source of national power. Another geographical factor is the presence of high mountains, rivers, marshes, deserts, forests and so on, which constitute a weakness or an asset for the international position of a state. For example, the vastness of the erstwhile Soviet State has been a major factor in military strategy. It resulted in the defeat of Napoleon and Hitler. In case of Israel, its small size gives them a feeling of vulnerability and insecurity, which drives their national strategy.

### **Natural Resources**

a) **Food.** Self-sufficiency in food has always been a source of great strength. The countries which are not self-sufficient in food cannot feel secure. For example, the UK and Germany have always been deficient in food, while the US and Russia have traditionally enjoyed self-sufficiency. In India, there is no shortage of food, yet large segments of population suffer from malnutrition. It has a direct bearing on national security.

b) **Raw Materials.** These are important for industrial production and more particularly, for waging war. Also, the importance of raw materials has further increased with mechanisation and development of technologies. For example, the US and Russia are self-sufficient in oil and China controls the production of rare earths. The availability of Uranium has become a major factor in the potential power of nations.

**Industrial Capacity.** Industrial capacity is another factor which determines the power of a nation. The quality and production capacity of the industrial plants, the technical skills of the human resource, the research and development, the managerial organisation and cutting-edge technologies are the factors upon which the industrial capacity of a nation and, hence, its power depend. For example, Congo has vast deposits of high-grade Uranium but does not have the industrial plants to put the uranium deposits to industrial or military use. Iran has lots of oil

but not enough refining capacity. On the other hand, possession of uranium by P-5 (the US, the UK, Russia, France and China) has added considerably to their national power as they have the industrial capacity to process it. India has large deposits of coal and iron. India has not been able to fully exploit its reserves of strategic raw materials, possibly due to lack of suitable technologies, infrastructure and investment.

**Population.** A country cannot become a first-rate power unless it has a sizeable population. Suffice to say that the size and quality of population have a profound effect on national power.

**Military Power.** *Military preparedness requires a military (establishment) capable of supporting the foreign policy of a nation.* Contributory factors are - technology, leadership, quality and size of the armed forces.

a) **Technology.** The development and adoption of firearms, tanks, guns and aircraft have had a profound effect on the course of battles. To illustrate, if one reads the review of British operations during the initial stages of the Second World War, which Churchill gave in the secret session of parliament on 23 April 1942,<sup>1</sup> one is struck by the fact that all defeats on land, on sea and in air have one common denominator—the disregard of technological capabilities being developed by Germans and the Japanese during the pre-war years. The U-boats played havoc with the British shipping and adversely affected their ability to move forces from one theatre of war to another, as also to sustain them. Conversely, the development of radar technology by the British during the war years gave them enormous advantage over their enemies. In the present-day context, capabilities in cyber warfare, space assets and smart strike weapons will give a great edge to the powers that are able to develop and operationalise such technologies.

b) **Leadership.** The quality of military leadership has always exerted a decisive influence upon national power. We have the examples of the military genius of Fredrick the Great, Napoleon, the futility of Maginot Line psychology of the French General Staff versus the “blitzkrieg” adopted by the German General Staff, and closer home the effect of superior military leadership led by Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw in India’s 1971 War with Pakistan.

c) **Quality and Size of the Armed Forces.** The importance of this factor is obvious. *However, the question that has to be answered by the political leadership of the country is, how large a military establishment can a nation afford in view of its resources and commitments or national interests?* There is

the frequent debate—“guns” versus “butter.” That really is the domain of “Grand Strategy.”

### **Intangibles, or Constantly Changing Factors**

**National Character.** It is difficult to define the national character of a nation. It can only be felt or perceived. National character influences national power. For example, its imprint lasts for a long time<sup>2</sup>.

- a) **Russians:** The “elementary force and persistence.”
- b) **Americans:** The “individual initiative and inventiveness.”
- c) **British:** The “undogmatic common sense.”
- d) **Germans:** The “discipline and thoroughness.” Lack of moderation.
- e) **Chinese:** “Inscrutable.”

**National Morale.** National morale is the degree of determination with which a nation supports the foreign policies of its government during peace and war. It permeates activities such as agricultural and industrial production, its armed forces and diplomatic service. High national morale can be of great help at times of national crises, when a decision of fundamental importance must be taken upon which the survival of the nation might well depend.<sup>3</sup>

**The Moral Factor.** In warfare, the force of armies is the product of the mass multiplied by something else, an unknown factor, F. Can this factor F be quantified? Some analysts have attempted this through an equation. Let us say two countries A and B have their armies in the proportion of 3:7, and yet country A is able to inflict a defeat on country B in a battle. This can be represented by the equation:

Force of armies = mass x **F** (**F** is the unknown factor)

Say  $3A = 7B$

Therefore,  $A/B = 7/3$

Hence,  $F = 2.333$

From such equations of historical experiences (battles, campaigns, periods of conflict), a series of numbers are obtained, which form basis for historical laws.<sup>4</sup>

**Quality of Society and the Government:** These two aspects have a profound influence on the national morale.

- (a) Any country with deep and unbridgeable class divisions will find its national morale in a precarious state. Czarist Russia, Austrian monarchy, Soviet Union during the Second World War and the French since the ‘30s can be cited as historical examples. In contrast, in Nazi Germany, the national morale was high almost till the end. The Japanese during World War II continued to believe in their cause.

(b) The power of a nation, in view of its national morale, resides in the quality of its government. A government that is truly representative, not only in the sense of parliamentary majority, but above all, in the sense of being able to translate the convictions and aspirations of the people into international objectives and policies, has the best chance of marshalling the national energies in support of those objectives and policies. Without national morale, national power is either nothing but material force or else a potentiality that awaits its realisation in vain. Yet, the means of improving national morale lie in the improvement of the quality of government. Everything else is a matter of chance.

**The Quality of Diplomacy.** It is an important determinant of national power and is its most visible face. Diplomacy has to be supported by military power. However, there is a dividing line between diplomacy and military power, though this line becomes wider or overlaps depending on different situations. The prominent place of diplomacy as a component of national power has been described by Professor Hans J. Morgenthau as under:

*Diplomacy, one might say, is the brain of national power, as national morale is its soul.*

**Quantification of Power.** Ray Cline<sup>5</sup> in his work “Power, Strategy and Security” has tried to quantify the power of a state mathematically by an equation:

$$P_p = (C + E + M) \times (S + W)$$

Where,

$P_p$  is the “perceived power of a state.”

$C$  is the critical mass which includes territory and population.

$E$  is the economic power.

$M$  is the military power.

$S$  is the strategic purpose.

$W$  is the will to pursue national strategy.

The above equation does not take into account intangibles like national character, national morale, leadership and quality of government and to that extent is flawed. For example, it rated the US as 35 and the erstwhile USSR as 67.5. The events proved the inadequacy of the equation.

Cline also describes power as “a subjective factor” and uses the term “perceived power” in his formula. He indicates that “real power” is something different from “perceived power” but does not clarify this distinction.

## **Soft Power of a State**

Soft power is the ability to obtain what one wants through co-option and attraction. It is in contradiction to “hard power,” which is the use of coercion and compellance. The phrase was coined by Joseph Nye of Harvard University in 1990 in a book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. He further developed the concept in 2004 in another book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. The primary currencies of soft power are an actor's values, culture, policies and institutions—and the extent to which these "primary currencies," as Nye calls them, are able to attract or repel other actors to "want, what you want."

That said, military force can sometimes contribute to soft power. Dictators like Hitler and Stalin cultivated myths of invincibility and inevitability to structure expectations and attract others to join their bandwagon. A well-run military can be a source of attraction, and military-to-military cooperation and training programmes, for example, can establish transnational networks that enhance a country's soft power. Napoleon's image as a great General and military hero arguably attracted much of the foreign aristocracy to him. The impressive job done by the Indian Armed Forces in providing humanitarian relief after the Indian Ocean tsunami and the South Asian earthquake in 2005 helped restore the attractiveness of the Indian military. Of course, misuse of military resources can also undercut soft power. The Soviet Union had a great deal of soft power in the years after World War II, but they destroyed it by the way they used their hard power against Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Similarly American military actions in the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan undercut their soft power.

India's soft power is based on its social and cultural values, the Indian Diaspora abroad and its knowledge base. India is being considered a knowledge superpower and is well placed to leverage its position in international relations. To what extent it will add to our CNP index is difficult to say at this point of time. The exercise to compute our CNP based on the index system is still being evolved.

## **Comprehensive National Power (CNP)**

CNP is a combination of a country's overall capability in terms of its economy, scientific base, military capability, human and material resources, level of social development, environmental factors, system of governance, government's regulatory mechanisms, diplomatic profile and, above all, internal cohesiveness.

A country's ability to influence the world and regional affairs is directly proportional to its perceived CNP.

## **Indian Calculation of Comprehensive National Power**

The National Security Council Secretariat is in the process of evolving a system to determine the National Security Index (NSI), which has the following components:

- a) Human Development Index (HDI)
- b) Research and Development Index (RDI)
- c) Defence Expenditure Index (DEI)
- d) Population Index (PI)

Each of the above indices is further subdivided into subindices. For example, HDI is based on life expectancy index, education index, per capita income index and so on.

India is the fourth most secure country in the world, after the US, China and Norway. India was compared to 49 other countries on expenditure, size of the armed forces and population. However, the index ignores nonconventional threats like naxalism, health, environment and human resources development. Here, India's ranking falls to around 40.<sup>6</sup>

The efficacy of the NSI as a tool in strategic decision making is debatable. The ambit of the calculation appears to be too restricted. It does not take into account natural resources, military preparedness, internal cohesiveness, quality of governance and so on. It is also shrouded in secrecy.

### **Grand Strategy**

The grand strategy of a state may be defined as a long-term plan to accomplish its domestic and external objectives. Policies flowing from the grand strategy must aim to promote the vital interests of a nation, while preventing other nations from interfering with such interests.<sup>7</sup> It is the application of the full range of national power to influence national and nonnational actors. It includes, but is not limited to, military means.

### **Hierarchy of Strategy**

A simplistic representation of hierarchy of strategy is shown below in the form of a chart. It should be noted that the hierarchy is not rigid—it can have many lateral as well as vertical linkages and can include other sub-strategies.

**Chart Showing the Hierarchy of Strategy**





Strategy is subordinate to political guidance, but grand strategy often generates policies. For example, “NSC 68 : United States Objectives and Programmes for National Security,” a report to the president dated 31 January 1950 (originally “Top Secret” but now declassified and available on the Internet)<sup>8</sup> was a policy document prepared in 1950 that many argue constituted a US grand strategy for the Cold War. As such, it served successfully as a grand strategy for the Cold War period even though successive presidents adopted its provisions through numerous policies, doctrines and national security strategies.<sup>9</sup> The grand strategy that was adopted in 1950 played itself out on many fronts in different forms for the next four decades, till the collapse of the Soviet Union. One wonders if the US undertook such an exercise before launching its global war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq.

### **Grand Strategy versus Military Strategy**

A military strategy or a national security strategy due to its very nature must be kept secret and generally shrouded in ambiguity. On the other hand, the grand strategy of a nation may be well publicised and proclaimed by top leaders quite frequently at appropriate forums for the desired effect on target nations. Some statements by world leaders which have the nuances of a grand strategy are cited below:

*This is essentially a peoples’ contest. On the side of the Union it is a struggle for maintaining in the world that form and substance of government whose leading object is to elevate the condition of men; to lift artificial weights from all shoulders; to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all; to afford all an unfettered start and a fair chance in the race of life.*

—Abraham Lincoln, 4 July 1861, during American Civil War.



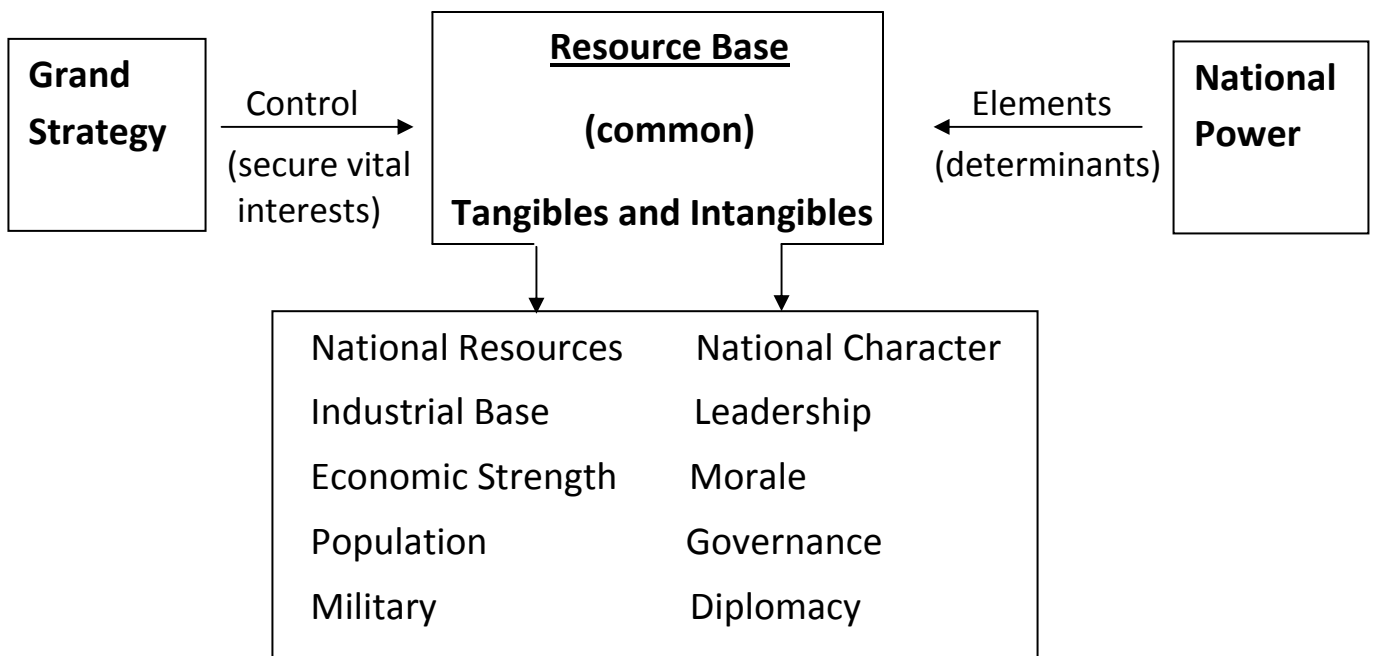
*Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capabilities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership.*

—24 Character Strategy by Deng Xiao Peng, Early 1990s.

A grand strategy is typically directed by the political leadership of a country, with inputs from various departments and institutions of the country. Obviously, military and foreign policy establishments will be prominent amongst these. Because of its scope and the number of different people, groups and establishments involved, a grand strategy is usually a matter of public record, although the details of implementation (such as military capabilities for force projection or the size of the strategic deterrence or the strategic forces are often concealed, or at best ambiguously stated). The development of a nation’s grand strategy may extend across many years or even multiple generations. The true objective of a grand strategy in today’s world must be to secure a peaceful environment in which a country can grow and prosper.

### **Relationship Between National Power and Grand Strategy**

A grand strategy is the art of controlling and utilising the resources of a nation to promote and secure vital interests against actual or potential adversaries. Resources—political, economic, military and other intangibles like national character, morale, leadership and diplomacy—are the elements or determinants of national power. Hence, the resource base is common to both. This relationship is depicted in a simple form in the following chart:



## Chart Showing Relationship Between National Power and Grand Strategy

The national power is relative to a nation's competitors or challengers. It is the perceived power (or weakness) of a nation which may deter or encourage an adversary/competitor/challenger to act in a manner that is inimical to the former. A grand strategy is required to orchestrate the national power in a way that would achieve national interests, while at the same time denying an opportunity to the adversary to act otherwise.

At this stage, it would be relevant to consider Pakistan's ongoing proxy war against India. In spite of the obvious advantage of a CNP on India's side, we have not been able to deter Pakistan from acting against our national interests. The inference that I would like to draw is that India has not been able to evolve a grand strategy that would bring to bear the full weight of its national power to thwart Pak designs. This calls for introspection by the highest policymaking organs of the state, like the National Security Council.

On the other hand, take the American example of acting in the Cuban Crisis against the erstwhile Soviet Union or the recent example of Russia (the successor state of the Soviet Union) acting against Georgia to safeguard its national interests. These instances illustrate not only the relationship but also the interplay between national power and a grand strategy. *In the final analysis, a grand strategy is a vehicle through which a nation or a group of nations bring to bear their comprehensive national power to achieve their vital interests.*

### Conclusion

National power is the sum total of a nation's resources which determines its place in the world order. These resources are both, tangibles and intangibles. Of these, four important resources are economic, military strength, leadership and diplomacy—not necessarily in the same order.

A grand strategy is the art of bringing to bear the national power to achieve a nation's vital interests and produce desired outcomes. All the policies and strategies may emanate from the grand strategy. In peacetime, diplomacy translates a grand strategy into visible actions in the international arena. Should the resource base undergo a change, the grand strategy itself may get modified, thus generating a new set of policies and strategies.

### Endnotes:

1. Winston Churchill. *Secret Session Speeches*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946. p. 53.

2. Hans J. Morgenthau. Chap. 9 in *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. Calcutta: Scientific Book Agency, 1993. p. 127.
3. Ibid., chapter. 9, p. 129.
4. Leo Tolstoy. Chapter. II in Book XIV of *War and Peace*.
5. Cline served as deputy director for intelligence in the CIA and as director of intelligence and research in the Department of State.
6. IBN live. "India 4th most secure country, claims security index." 8 August 2007. <<http://ibnlive.in.com/news/india-4th-most-secure-country-claims-security-index/46434-3.html>> (accessed 10 July 2010).
7. Air Marshal Narayan Menon. "State, Strategy, Power and Policy." *Indian Defence Review* vol. 23.3, Jul/Sep 2008. p. 95.
8. "NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security." A Report to the President Pursuant to the President's Directive of January 31, 1950. 14 April 1950. <<http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68.htm>> (accessed 10 July 2010).
9. Harry R. Yarger. Chap. 2 in *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century*. Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger Security International, 2008.