

# Vision 2047: SDGs as Pillars of India's National Security Doctrine in the 21st Century

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## ABSTRACT

As India approaches the centenary of its independence in 2047, the imperative to redefine national security through a broader, development-centric lens has never been more pressing. This paper argues that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not merely global development benchmarks but foundational pillars for a comprehensive and resilient national security doctrine in the 21st century. Traditional conceptions of security—dominated by military preparedness—must now expand to encompass environmental sustainability, economic equity, public health, food and water security, and inclusive governance. Drawing on empirical data, policy analysis, and theoretical insights from human security and developmental realism, this research critically examines how SDG integration can mitigate structural vulnerabilities, counter non-traditional threats, and promote internal stability and external credibility. The paper also explores India's policy architecture and institutional readiness to mainstream SDGs into strategic planning, highlighting key gaps and pathways for reform. By framing development as a security imperative, this study contributes to a forward-looking vision of India@2047—secure, sustainable, and strategically sovereign in an increasingly complex global order.

**Keywords:** National security, Governance, Sustainable development, Environment, human security.

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## INTRODUCTION

As India approaches its 100th year of independence in 2047, the evolving security landscape necessitates a transformative approach to national security. No longer confined to conventional military threats, the security paradigm has expanded to include non-traditional and transnational challenges such as climate change, pandemics, resource scarcity, internal displacement, and socio-economic inequality. These issues, deeply interconnected with development outcomes, demand a doctrinal shift—one that aligns India's national security vision with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The SDGs, adopted by 193 United Nations member states in 2015, provide a comprehensive and interconnected framework for addressing poverty, inequality, health, education, environmental degradation, and justice—factors that directly or indirectly influence national stability and resilience (United Nations, 2015). For India, the SDGs are not merely developmental aspirations but strategic imperatives. A secure nation in the 21st century is one where environmental sustainability, inclusive economic growth, and social equity are prioritized as tools of preventive diplomacy and internal peacebuilding (Baldwin, 1997).

India's National Security Doctrine has historically focused on external threats, territorial sovereignty, and defence modernization. However, the rise in internal conflicts, environmental risks, and socio-economic disparities highlight the limitations of a purely militaristic approach (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). Integrating SDGs into security planning can create a multidimensional security architecture that is anticipatory, inclusive, and human-centric. It ensures that development becomes a force multiplier for peace and national strength, rather than a disconnected policy stream. This paper aims to critically analyse how the Sustainable Development Goals can serve as foundational pillars for India's national security strategy in the lead-up to 2047. It argues that national security and sustainable development are not parallel agendas but intersecting spheres that must be harmonized. By exploring key SDGs—such as those related to poverty (SDG 1), health (SDG 3), water (SDG 6), climate action (SDG 13), and peace and justice (SDG 16)—the research highlights their strategic relevance to India's internal and external security concerns.

## Conceptual Framework

**Traditional vs. Comprehensive National Security:** National security has historically been understood through the lens of realist international relations theory, emphasizing military power, territorial integrity, and protection from external aggression (Walt, 1991). This state-centric approach dominated strategic thought during the Cold War and continues to

influence doctrines in many nations, including India. In this paradigm, threats are typically perceived as external, and the state is the primary referent object of security.

However, this narrow and militarized conception of security has proven inadequate in addressing the multifaceted risks of the 21st century, including internal unrest, environmental degradation, public health crises, and cyber vulnerabilities (Buzan, Waver, & de Wilde, 1998). The comprehensive security framework emerged to include non-military dimensions such as economic stability, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, and human welfare—broadening the security discourse to be more inclusive and preventive. In the Indian context, while traditional threats from hostile neighbours persist, internal security challenges such as left-wing extremism, communal tensions, and climate-induced displacements underscore the need for a more integrated and holistic national security architecture (Mukherjee, 2020).

**The Evolution of Human Security Discourse:** The concept of human security, formally introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1994, shifted the focus from state to individual as the primary unit of security. Human security comprises seven dimensions—economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security (UNDP, 1994). This people-centred approach emphasizes freedom from fear and freedom from want, recognizing that threats to security often emerge from deprivation, inequality, and lack of opportunity.

The human security framework is particularly relevant for developing countries like India, where a large segment of the population remains vulnerable to socio-economic shocks. By addressing root causes of insecurity—such as poverty, lack of education, poor health infrastructure, and environmental hazards—human security helps prevent conflict, reduce violence, and enhance national resilience (Acharya, 2001). While the Indian state has yet to formally adopt a human security doctrine, several national missions—like Ayushman Bharat (health), Swachh Bharat (sanitation), and Jal Jeevan Mission (water)—reflect implicit recognition of human security principles in policy design.

**The Strategic Value of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted as part of the UN's 2030 Agenda, represent a global commitment to eliminate poverty, reduce inequality, combat climate change, and promote peace and justice. Although originally framed as a development agenda, the strategic implications of SDGs are profound, especially for countries like India where development challenges are directly linked to stability and security. For example: SDG 1 (No Poverty) addresses economic deprivation, a root cause of radicalization and insurgency. SDG 13 (Climate Action) seeks to reduce the impact of climate-induced disasters, which displace populations and strain public infrastructure. SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) is crucial for rule of law, reducing corruption, and promoting social cohesion—all essential for national stability.

Integrating SDGs into India's national security doctrine would mean recognizing that development is not a substitute for security—but a precondition for it (Chandhoke, 2016). As India aspires to achieve its Vision 2047, aligning developmental progress with strategic imperatives will be key to crafting a resilient and secure state.

#### Mapping SDGs to National Security Dimensions

While the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are framed as developmental targets, they hold significant strategic value in India's national security context. Given the deep interlinkages between underdevelopment, social unrest, and environmental fragility, integrating SDGs into security planning offers a preventive and holistic approach to managing threats. Each SDG contributes uniquely to dimensions of internal, environmental, socio-economic, or geopolitical security, reinforcing national resilience.

**SDG 1 (No Poverty) and Internal Stability:** Poverty remains a driver of unrest, extremism, and delegitimization of state authority. The NITI Aayog SDG Index (2023) shows a correlation between high poverty and incidents of Maoist insurgency and communal tensions. Deprivation often creates conditions for parallel governance by non-state actors (Yadav, 2018). Policy measures such as MGNREGA, direct benefit transfers, and financial inclusion reduce grievances, enhance state legitimacy, and undercut insurgent appeal (Sen, 2010). Thus, eradicating poverty under SDG 1 is a strategic priority for sustaining internal peace.

**SDG 2 & 3 (Food Security and Health) as Public Security:** Food insecurity and weak health systems can escalate into security crises. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed how public health emergencies disrupt governance, supply chains, and law enforcement (Kapila, 2021). SDGs 2 and 3 strengthen societal resilience through PDS, mid-day meal schemes, and Ayushman Bharat, especially in vulnerable regions. Robust public health and food systems reduce the risks of large-scale displacement, unrest, and collapse of essential services.

**SDG 6 (Clean Water) and Resource Conflict Mitigation:** Water scarcity is emerging as a serious conflict trigger, evident in disputes like the Cauvery River conflict and growing rural-urban tensions over groundwater (Joy et al., 2014). SDG 6, focused on clean water and sanitation, is vital to prevent these tensions from escalating. Programs like Jal Jeevan Mission and investments in water conservation reduce ecological stress, support agriculture, and prevent conflict over shared resources (NITI Aayog, 2020).

SDG 7 & 13 (Energy and Climate Action) and Environmental Security: India's reliance on fossil fuels and exposure to climate volatility endangers long-term security. Disasters such as floods, droughts, and cyclones increasingly strain governance systems and public infrastructure (TERI, 2022). SDGs 7 and 13 promote renewable energy and climate resilience, essential for energy independence, disaster preparedness, and sustainable development. Climate-sensitive planning in military and urban infrastructure can reduce future vulnerabilities (Dubash et al., 2021).

SDG 10 & 16 (Inequality and Justice) and Social Cohesion: Inequality and weak governance institutions erode public trust and create fertile ground for unrest. SDG 10 and SDG 16—addressing inclusion, justice, and strong institutions—are crucial for democratic resilience. Fault lines based on caste, class, region, or religion can be weaponized by internal or external actors. Strengthening judicial access, anti-corruption measures, and representative governance bolsters legitimacy and reduces systemic fragility (Chandhoke, 2016).

SDG 17 (Global Partnerships) and Strategic Diplomacy: Security in today's interdependent world requires global cooperation. SDG 17 emphasizes partnerships, technology sharing, and capacity-building. India's engagement through forums like Quad, I2U2, and BRICS fosters joint responses to climate threats, cybercrime, and pandemics. Development diplomacy—such as vaccine exports, disaster relief, and digital outreach—builds soft power and strategic influence (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

### **India's Current National Security Doctrine: Gaps and Limitations**

India's national security doctrine has historically been shaped by external threats, particularly those arising from Partition, multiple wars, and enduring border disputes with Pakistan and China (Mukherjee & Yazdani, 2018). This has fostered a conventional, state-centric security paradigm centred on territorial integrity, deterrence, and counterinsurgency operations. However, in the face of emerging 21st-century challenges, this traditional approach shows clear structural and strategic limitations.

Overemphasis on Hard Security: India's strategic posture continues to prioritize military modernization, conventional deterrence, and border defence. Policy documents like the Raksha Mantri's Operational Directive (2009) and the Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2015) reflect this hard-security bias (MoD, 2015). While such priorities remain vital, they overshadow non-traditional threats such as climate change, cyber warfare, pandemics, and internal displacement—now globally recognized as critical national security concerns (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998).

The absence of a publicly articulated National Security Strategy (NSS) further hampers India's capacity to synthesize diverse threats into a coherent policy framework. Although the Kargil Review Committee Report (2000) recommended an NSS, it remains unrealized, undermining institutional accountability and long-term risk integration (Saran, 2020).

Fragmented Institutional Architecture: India's security governance is dispersed across multiple ministries—such as the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), and National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS)—leading to overlapping mandates and weak coordination. For instance, while the MHA oversees internal security, environmental and health threats fall under separate ministries with limited inter-agency collaboration (Bajpai, 2021). The lack of a unified risk assessment mechanism and poor integration of scientific, developmental, and climate intelligence further hinders anticipatory governance.

Neglect of Human and Environmental Security: Despite constitutional and policy commitments, India's security doctrine underrepresents human security—defined by poverty eradication, healthcare, education, and equality (UNDP, 1994). Existing frameworks such as the National Disaster Management Policy (2009) treat disasters reactively rather than as ongoing threats to socio-economic stability (NDMA, 2009). Similarly, climate vulnerability remains poorly integrated into strategic institutions like the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or the National Security Adviser (NSA), limiting India's readiness for climate-induced disruptions (Dubash et al., 2021).

Reactive Rather Than Preventive Approach: India's security planning tends to be crisis-driven rather than foresight-based. Events like the Pulwama-Balakot strike (2019) or the Galwan clash (2020) triggered tactical responses but failed to prompt deeper doctrinal shifts linking development, diplomacy, and regional economic engagement (Raja Mohan, 2020). A truly preventive security framework would invest in inclusive development, decentralization, and institutional transparency to pre-empt socio-political volatility.

### **Institutional Readiness and Policy Mechanisms**

India's evolving security landscape necessitates an institutional architecture that integrates sustainable development goals (SDGs) into its national security doctrine. However, current mechanisms, while expansive in form, face critical limitations in coherence, capacity, and inter-sectoral integration.

National Institutions and SDG Alignment: India has established a range of institutional frameworks to implement the SDGs. The NITI Aayog serves as the central coordinating agency for SDG localisation, tracking progress through the SDG India Index and state-level performance dashboards (NITI Aayog, 2023). This institutional innovation facilitates

vertical alignment between national priorities and international commitments. However, NITI Aayog's mandate is primarily developmental, and lacks formal authority over national security planning. Its integration with strategic bodies like the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), Defence Planning Committee (DPC), and Home Ministry remains minimal. As a result, the development-security nexus is fragmented and under-leveraged in long-term strategic planning (Bajpai, 2021).

**Disaster Management and Resilience Institutions:** India's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) plays a crucial role in building resilience, a core SDG priority (SDG 11, SDG 13). It has developed national and state disaster management plans and initiated programs such as the National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project and urban flood mitigation schemes. However, the NDMA often functions reactively, with inadequate early warning systems, limited scientific integration, and overlapping roles with state governments (Kapoor & Subramanian, 2020). Climate adaptation—a crucial area of intersection between SDG implementation and national resilience—is handled separately by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Yet, there is no overarching institutional mechanism to embed climate risk within national security doctrines or military preparedness frameworks (Dubash et al., 2021).

**Security and Development Institutions: (A Disconnect)** India's traditional security institutions—the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), and intelligence agencies—continue to operate within conventional security paradigms, treating development as a peripheral issue. While civil-military coordination exists in limited zones (e.g., border development programs), the broader integration of human development indicators into national threat assessments remains weak (Mukherjee & Yazdani, 2018). The lack of a codified National Security Strategy (NSS) further hampers institutional alignment. Without a unifying doctrine that bridges security and development, ministries continue to work in silos, resulting in policy duplication, underutilization of resources, and a reactive rather than preventive approach to risk governance (Saran, 2020).

**Gaps in Multi-Stakeholder Engagement:** SDG implementation requires strong partnerships between the government, private sector, academia, and civil society (UN, 2015). While India has engaged think tanks and academic bodies (e.g., RIS, TERI) for SDG research, their integration into the strategic decision-making process is minimal. National security remains heavily bureaucratized and militarized, with limited input from experts on public health, climate science, food systems, and migration studies (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

### **International Comparisons and Best Practices**

The intersection of sustainable development and national security has garnered increasing global attention, leading several countries to institutionalize frameworks that integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their security architectures. India's pursuit of a holistic and resilient national security doctrine can benefit significantly from the examination of these international experiences.

**United States: (Whole-of-Government Approach):** The United States exemplifies a whole-of-government approach that recognizes the interlinkages between development, climate resilience, and national security. The U.S. National Security Strategy (2017) explicitly identifies sustainable economic growth, climate adaptation, and global health as strategic imperatives (White House, 2017). The Department of Defense (DoD) treats climate change as a “threat multiplier,” incorporating climate risk assessments into military readiness and operational planning (DoD, 2021). Moreover, the Global Fragility Act (2019) mandates coordinated interventions across diplomacy, development, and defense sectors to address structural causes of instability such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation (U.S. Congress, 2019). This framework emphasizes preventive engagement and aligns security with development goals.

**European Union: (Security–Development Nexus)** The European Union (EU) has institutionalized the security-development nexus through its EU Global Strategy (2016), which positions sustainable development as integral to conflict prevention, governance strengthening, and peacebuilding (European External Action Service, 2016). SDG priorities are embedded within the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, emphasizing the promotion of human rights, rule of law, and democratic governance (Smith, 2018).

Additionally, the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism exemplifies regional coordination in disaster response, enhancing resilience to environmental and humanitarian emergencies at both national and international levels (European Commission, 2020).

**Japan: (Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience)** Japan's strategic focus on disaster risk reduction provides a robust model for integrating sustainable development into national security. As a key proponent of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030), Japan champions resilience-building as a core security priority (UNDRR, 2015). National policies emphasize early warning systems, local capacity-building, and community-based resilience—embedding SDG principles into disaster preparedness (Kobayashi & Shaw, 2019).



### Scandinavian Countries: (Social Cohesion and Human Security)

Scandinavian nations such as Sweden and Norway adopt a human security-centric model of national resilience. Their comprehensive welfare systems promote equality (SDG 10), justice (SDG 16), and institutional trust—key ingredients for societal stability (Elgström & Smith, 2019). By prioritizing inclusive governance, gender equality, and civic participation, these countries effectively reduce structural vulnerabilities and prevent social fragmentation.

Lessons for India (India can draw several strategic lessons from these international best practices):

- Institutional Integration: Embedding SDG objectives within national security institutions to ensure coordinated, whole-of-government responses (Bajpai, 2021).
- Climate and Disaster Resilience: Mainstreaming climate risk assessments and disaster preparedness into military and civilian security frameworks (Dubash et al., 2021).
- Human Security Orientation: Addressing the root causes of insecurity—such as poverty, inequality, and marginalization—through inclusive and equitable development (UNDP, 1994).
- Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration: Enhancing synergy among government, civil society, private sector, and academia to build comprehensive security networks (United Nations, 2015).
- Anticipatory Governance: Moving from reactive crisis response to preventive planning using sustainable development indicators as early-warning tools (Raja Mohan, 2020).

### Vision 2047: A Strategic Roadmap

India's Vision 2047—marking the centenary of its independence—calls for a transformative approach to national security that is deeply intertwined with sustainable development goals (SDGs). This vision requires a strategic roadmap that integrates economic, environmental, social, and geopolitical dimensions to ensure holistic and resilient security for the nation in the 21st century.

**Integrating SDGs into National Security Policy:** The strategic roadmap must institutionalize the SDGs as foundational pillars of India's national security doctrine. This requires formal inclusion of SDG targets related to poverty eradication (SDG 1), health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), climate action (SDG 13), and peace and justice (SDG 16) within security assessments and planning processes (Bajpai, 2021). Aligning national security policy with SDGs will promote human-centric security, moving beyond traditional military paradigms to address root causes of conflict and instability (UNDP, 1994).

**Enhancing Institutional Coordination and Capacity:** Vision 2047 demands robust institutional reforms to bridge existing gaps between development and security sectors. The creation of a National Security and Sustainable Development Council (NSSDC), integrating representatives from NITI Aayog, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Environment, and other key stakeholders, can facilitate policy coherence and synchronized implementation (Mukherjee & Yazdani, 2018). Additionally, enhancing capacities in data analytics, early warning systems, and scenario planning will improve anticipatory governance and crisis response (Dubash et al., 2021).

**Climate Security and Disaster Resilience:** Given India's vulnerability to climate change impacts, integrating climate security within the national doctrine is indispensable. This includes mainstreaming climate adaptation strategies into military infrastructure, border management, and urban planning (Pant & Joshi, 2020). Strengthening disaster resilience through enhanced coordination of the NDMA with security agencies will mitigate risks from natural disasters, which increasingly threaten stability (Kapoor & Subramanian, 2020).

**Promoting Social Cohesion and Inclusive Growth:** Addressing socioeconomic inequalities, as outlined in SDGs 10 and 16, is critical to preventing internal unrest and fostering social cohesion. Policies promoting inclusive development, equitable access to resources, and justice reform must be prioritized within the security framework to reduce vulnerabilities exploited by insurgent and extremist groups (Saran, 2020).

**Leveraging Global Partnerships:** India's strategic roadmap should emphasize multilateral cooperation and SDG-aligned diplomacy to enhance regional and global security. Leveraging platforms such as the United Nations, BRICS, and the Quad to promote sustainable development as a component of peacebuilding will enhance India's soft power and strategic depth (Bajpai, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

As India approaches the centenary of its independence, the imperative to reconceptualize national security through the prism of sustainable development becomes increasingly urgent. This study demonstrates that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a vital framework for addressing the multidimensional challenges that confront India's security landscape in the 21st century. Traditional security paradigms, centred predominantly on military strength and territorial integrity, must evolve to incorporate socioeconomic development, environmental sustainability, and human security as foundational elements. The SDGs—ranging from poverty eradication and health improvement to

climate action and inclusive governance—serve not only as development targets but also as strategic pillars that underpin internal stability and geopolitical resilience.

Integrating SDGs into India's national security doctrine under Vision 2047 is more than a policy preference; it is a strategic necessity that aligns India's domestic priorities with global imperatives. This integration demands institutional reforms fostering intersectoral coordination, proactive climate resilience strategies, and policies that promote social cohesion and justice. Moreover, India's expanding role in global governance and multilateral partnerships further accentuates the importance of sustainable development as an instrument of strategic diplomacy and peacebuilding.

Ultimately, the future of Indian national security lies in embracing a holistic vision that transcends conventional boundaries—reimagining sovereignty not merely as control over territory but as the capacity to ensure the well-being and dignity of its people within a sustainable and secure global order. Vision 2047 thus provides a historic opportunity for India to lead by example, embedding sustainability at the heart of its security doctrine and charting a resilient path forward in an increasingly complex world.

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