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## What are India's national security interests?

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**Guest Column- by Moorthy Muthuswamy.**

The newly appointed Prime Minister, Mr. Manmohan Singh has created considerable concern among some of us by stating that he is open to soft borders with Pakistan when it has become clear that such a step will likely lead to the destruction of India ( Soft Borders with Pakistan: A Certain Suicide <sup>[1]</sup>, Prithiviraj, Again? <sup>[2]</sup>). His new Home Minister aggravated it by saying that he will take a "humane" approach to the illegal flow from the neighboring Islamic Bangladesh -- a surprising statement for a country where the rule of law is hardly enforceable. Thus serious questions have arisen whether the newly elected coalition led by Congress can genuinely advance national interests.

The above two statements, if reflected at the policy level will lead to flooding of India's eastern and western borders from the neighboring countries, as I had discussed in my analysis listed above. Is that in the national interest?

### India's national security interests

For a secular country such as India, this topic is a tricky one to define. But it becomes much clearer when one understands the circumstances of India's birth and the enemies it has to defend against.

Just as Israel was created for Jewish people, the logic of 1947 partition in the name of Islam and the subsequent non-Muslim

ethnic cleansing from all Muslim majority areas into India defines its national security interest as the following: India is, first and foremost the land where non-Muslims can live free and secure, along with other minorities. Without articulating this view, in my opinion, India will never develop the clarity to defend itself from the ongoing onslaught on it in the name of Islam.

Such an articulation does not make Indian Muslims second class citizens, because no constitutional changes are made. The dynamics of Islamic fundamentalism and its implications on Indian security are discussed in an earlier publication of mine ([When are India and Pakistan ready for peace?](#) <sup>[3]</sup>).

## **Election manifesto**

The reason why India hasn't been able to put a stop to Pakistani sponsored terrorism is because it never created a mandate among its people to tackle it once for all. In a democratic system elections provide the platform to formulate and debate issues that are critical to the nation – and thus generate a mandate. Even though the Indian public continues to see terrorism as the number one issue (according to a recent India Today poll over 40% polled considered terrorism as the number one issue for them, over and above any other issue), over the years party after party have barely talked or tackled this issue with determination. Almost none have articulated how they would solve this problem.

The dethroned NDA regime put the revocation of Article 370, a necessary requirement for solving India's terrorism problem, as part of the election manifesto. But it never articulated how it intended to solve it. We now know that it never had any plans of revoking Article 370. In the recent election NDA took security out of its manifesto. The Congress party too hasn't articulated how it plans to solve India's terrorism problem. Hence, as with previous regimes it is unlikely to address this issue adequately. As I pointed out initially, Congress may end up taking policy decisions adverse to Indian interests – if it is not careful.

There have been instances of the Indian public giving a large mandate on the issue of security. Mr. Narendra Modi's regime in Gujarat was voted to power on a massive security mandate after the Godhra killings and the subsequent riots where scores were killed.

## **A systemic problem**

We thus see that the poor track record of successive ruling regimes on the issue of national security points to a systemic deficiency in being prepared to take security-related policy initiatives. It is time the political parties realize that by not discussing national security issues just because it may hurt the "feelings" of a minority, there are not only undermining their ability to govern,

and even, as the recent election results have shown, may find themselves not get reelected.

Being out of power for many years and through the statements noted at the top of this article, the Congress-led coalition may perhaps be not up-to-date on national security concerns of India. The new cabinet and in particular, -- the Prime Minister, the Congress Party President, Home, Defense and External Affairs Ministers should get themselves debriefed by top Indian strategic experts on the current scenario and get advice on their policy initiatives on security before making statement. This is a must before embarking on any major security or “peace” initiative. To jump into talks with Pakistan in June without doing so would be very ill-advised.

*(The views expressed here are author’s own. The writer is a nuclear physicist based in America. He is also a director of Indian American Intellectuals Forum, a New York-based non-profit organization. His contact address: [moorthy@charter.net](mailto:moorthy@charter.net)<sup>[4]</sup>)*

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