

National Security Advisor to chair Strategic Planning Group

What is the issue?

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- The National Security Advisor (NSA) will now chair the Strategic Planning Group (SPG) as well, with Cabinet Secretary only as its member.

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- The decision reflects a lack of understanding of the nature and complexity of security challenges the country faces.

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What is the existing security architecture?

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- Soon after India became a nuclear-weapon state in May 1998, the national security architecture underwent a significant change.

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- At the apex, a National Security Council (NSC) was set up with the Prime Minister (PM) as the chairman.

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- Its permanent members included ministers of home, defence, external affairs and finance.

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- The NSC was provided with a secretariat.

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- A new post of National Security Advisor (NSA - currently Mr. Ajit Doval) was created to serve as the Secretary of the NSC.

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- In addition, a Strategic Planning Group (SPG) was established under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary.

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- The SPG included

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- i. all the key secretaries to the government
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- ii. the three armed forces chiefs
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- iii. the head of the external intelligence (R&AW)
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- iv. the Director of the Intelligence Bureau
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- A National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) was also set up.
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- It comprised of a number of retired civil and military officials, and it had direct access to the PM.
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- After the Kargil war in 1999, a Defence Intelligence Agency was set up to coordinate military-related intelligence.
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- Also, a Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) was set up to manage India's nuclear weapon arsenal.
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- In essence, the stress was on providing political leadership with multiple sources of information on security issues.
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How is the NSA's role evolving?

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- The role of the NSA was that of a key advisor to the government on longer-term strategic issues.
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- The NSA did not have a say in the day-to-day security issues.
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- However, in recent years, the NSA, by virtue of location in the PM's Office, has become an influential figure.
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- This remains the case even though there is no constitutional sanction for the post.
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- The NSA's responsibilities have been expanded sharply.
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- He now chairs the Defence Planning Group, with responsibility for military

planning, even as the NSAB's role has been downgraded.

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- Further, the role of the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, too, has been downgraded.

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- The NSA is also the head of the Executive Council of the NCA.

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- So in essence, the political leadership will have intelligence inputs and security assessments processed at the level of NSA.

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What is the concern now?

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- The inadequate response to the 2008 Mumbai terror attack is to be noted in this regard.

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- In this case, ad hoc decisions were taken, and no single individual could manage such diverse and fast-changing situations.

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- Given this, the increased reliance on the NSA raises serious questions as NSA is merely an advisor.

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- If he goes wrong, it is unclear where the accountability would lie.

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- Also, there might not be an opportunity for dissenting opinions being placed.

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- It is thus essential for the government to realise that even a highly centralised state could not afford to have a singular channel for the flow of such critical information.

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Source: Business Standard

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