

# Holistic Approach to National Growth and Security: An Army Perspective

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## Introduction

The holistic approach to national growth and security revolves around safeguarding national security interests. Hence, the threats to national security are matters of concern to every state and its citizens. The war and internal unrest in a country engage every citizen and hinder the development and national growth. National security is directly interrelated to protecting national unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country, which are essential elements of national growth. Today I will touch upon national security, threats to national security and the means to achieve peace and harmony which is the foundation of the holistic approach to national growth and security.

Although defeating separatist terrorism brought about relative peace there are many local and international challenges the country is facing in the contemporary world. These challenges can threaten Sri Lanka's position as a sovereign nation unless addressed carefully. The Easter Bombing brought in a new dimension to the threats and the dynamics of national security have changed dramatically. Sri Lanka now encounters active and potential threats from multiple sources.

It is not uncommon to see conflicts of interests that lead to dissatisfaction and disputes among nation states in this Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) global environment. Therefore, our bilateral and multilateral diplomatic engagements should also be sound enough to avoid conflicts while the military readiness remains at optimum level to deter threats and face any challenges.

Economic progress and sustainable peace and harmony are built upon a comprehensive National Security environment that enables pursuit of

nation's interests without any impediment. It is the right of any sovereign state to formulate National Security Strategy to protect national interests by considering strategic threat environment. The foremost responsibility that is vested upon the Government and the defense forces is to safeguard the country from potential threats there by creating an environment for sustainable peace and harmony. Let us try to identify few facets of national security and highlight its significance in achieving sustainable peace and harmony in Sri Lanka which is an essential ingredient in the holistic approach to national growth and security.

## Understanding National Security

We can define national security as an umbrella of protecting the core values that every nation strives to protect. These values enable people to lead a life on their shared common beliefs by preserving their national identity, sovereignty, economic and social wellbeing. There are many elements that have direct bearing on resilience of a nation and any national security architecture will have to take these into due consideration. These include three constants which are beyond the sphere of our control; geography, demography and natural resources and several other variables such as; national ideology, diplomacy and politics, economy, socio cultural aspects, techno scientific aspects and national security and defense. There are many threats and challenges we face as a sovereign nation.

### A. Threats

Threats common to all countries in the global environment include the changing status of global

commons threatens survival of population as well as chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) threatens life on earth. The cyber threats can disable, disrupt and paralyze economies and essential services while transnational crimes could make countries unsafe for investments. Climate change and global warming threatens survival of life on earth. While terrorism and insurgency are detrimental for economic wellbeing the religious fundamentalism effects economic and community wellbeing.

There are several other threats manifesting in the Indian Ocean Region. Regional politics can have destabilizing effects on small states. Piracy in the Indian Ocean poses threats to maritime security and being an island nation, we remain vulnerable. Power competition in the Indian Ocean region poses diplomatic risks and threatens economic wellbeing and national security.

There are several threats Specific to Sri Lanka being an Island Nation. The international perception of Sri Lanka as a country is being warped as part of the proxy war which is waged by separatist forces against Sri Lanka. Racism and Separatism spreads hatred and uncertainties among communities weakening the trust and understanding and hence, emergence of terrorism and insurgency remains a looming threat to national security. Potential of becoming a hub of organized and transnational crimes remains a threat due to geostrategic location while drug addiction has an adverse social, health and human security related impacts. Degrading natural environment poses challenges to human security while natural and manmade disasters retard the progress of the country in many ways.

#### B. Opportunities.

The geostrategic location of Sri Lanka is not only a challenge but offers many opportunities as well. If we wisely use these opportunities most of the challenges can be reasonably overcome. Important geostrategic location provides Sri

Lanka with advantages in the maritime and aviation domains and the global trend towards blue economy and aviation industry are opportunities for sustainable development. Tourism industry has enormous potential for development while the growing service sector provides opportunities for economic development. High literacy educated population and global demand for skill labour remains an underutilised opportunities, and expanding IT literacy in the country, especially among younger generation is an opportunity that needs to be explored. Value addition rather than exporting raw material is an unexploited opportunity and agricultural self-sufficiency is a possible opportunity not achieved yet. Integration of expatriate population and diaspora communities for economic and social development should also not be a missed opportunity.

#### The Way Forward for National Growth And Security: A Land Forces Perspective

##### C. Guard Against Possible Re-Emergence of Separatist Terrorism.

Although the LTTE is physically defeated as a conventional military force by eliminating its top leaders, strategists, and its logistics element, Sri Lanka has not yet been able to politically address and counter the separatist ideology. Hence, re-emergence of separatist terrorism will remain a challenge for the national security until an acceptable final solution is found to the national problem. National consensus in finding a lasting political solution is an essential ingredient for our overall success and wellbeing as a nation. Until a solution is achieved the Sri Lanka Army has an important role to play. We have to continue geographic domination of strategically important areas while denying the separatists the access to their center of gravity, the people, by winning the hearts and minds of the population.

##### D. Protect Territorial Integrity and Maritime Security Environment.

Maintenance of territorial integrity and maritime security is a serious national security concern that Sri Lanka being an island needs to be vigilant. The Indian Ocean is rapidly surpassing both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans as the world's busiest and most critical trade corridor. With the growth in legitimate international commerce in the maritime domain, escalation of criminal activities has also proliferated. Human and drug smuggling, weapons, and other contraband, as well as piracy and armed robberies against vessels, pose serious threats to maritime security. Although tactical and operational role of defending maritime areas fall squarely on Sri Lanka Navy the Army can assist in numerous ways, especially in intelligence sharing and assisting in coastal dominations where necessary.

#### E. Contain Foreign Interference in Domestic Affairs.

In today's environment, the possibility of foreign interference in our internal affairs remains a significant National Security concern. Sri Lanka's increasing importance in the maritime domain involves regional power politics. The likelihood of the extra regional powers showing more interest in the region and aligning with one or the other regional contender is a factor that may severely affect national security of Sri Lanka. Hence, these are developments that need to be considered diligently from the point of view of Sri Lanka's national security. These are key concerns for diplomatic engagements of the government. However, the armed forces need to be conscious of these challenges and create a conducive environment for diplomatic effort to progress smoothly.

#### F. Guard Against Cyber Security Threats.

Network intrusions are widely viewed as one of the most serious potential challenges to national security, public safety and to economic wellbeing. The new technology adds dynamism to communication including social media and the Internet. We have seen the potential of Internet driven media to destabilize nations and its affects

in the recent past, Arab Spring is just one such example. A segment of youth who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are the largest community of youngsters globally and locally that engages in activities on the web and they are vulnerable to influences of interested parties and that can pose a threat to national security. These issues need to be deliberately addressed at national level with international cooperation. The land forces need to maintain vigilance and be in readiness for proactive action where necessary both in cyber security domain as well as in mitigating the fall-out effects.

#### G. Address Environmental Degradation and Climatic Change.

The climate change increases the occurrence of natural disasters which severely affects national security. Climate change can impact national security ranging from rising sea levels, to severe droughts, to the melting of the polar caps, to more frequent and devastating floods that raise demand for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Changes created by a warming planet will lead to new conflicts such as refugees and depletion of resources. Catastrophic natural disasters can also lead to severe disasters like leaks of radioactive material and poisonous gases and all these would require increased support measures which need to be considered in our national security strategy. The military has to be involved not only in mitigating the damage caused by disasters but also in preventive actions such as reforestation, etc.

#### H. Mitigate the Influence of Transnational Organized Crimes.

Since the transnational criminal networks cause instability and subvert government institutions through antisocial activity in collaboration with the local underworld, the law enforcement agencies all over the world see that as a national security challenge. These transnational criminal organizations have acquired unprecedented wealth and power through various illicit activities. Even advanced technology of developed countries

is not enough to counter this threat. Sri Lanka must address this by reinvigorating the law and order establishment in a timely manner. The land forces can boost the efforts of the law enforcement authorities by sharing intelligence and ground action when legally called for.

#### I. Counter the Effects of Religious Fundamentalism.

Though Sri Lanka proved beyond doubt that terrorism can be defeated with a well-articulated whole government strategy and a well-focused leadership, we are not immune from the threat of religious fundamentalism. The Easter Sunday bombing proved this. Terrorism motivated by religious extremism will pose a considerable threat and the government and all stake holders must work together towards preventing the spread of religious fundamentalism and polarization of society along religious lines. The ground forces including Sri Lanka Army have a major role to play in addressing these challenges with vertical as well as horizontal cooperation with other law enforcement agencies.

#### J. Promote Socio-cultural and Political Stability.

The government is accountable to the people and as such, must ensure socio-political stability through good governance by focusing on its purpose and outcomes. It is to achieve peace and harmony among all Sri Lankans, regardless of creed, ethnic origin, and social status. The government and the people must engage in nation-building under the rule of law, constitutional democracy, and the full respect for human rights. Our people need to be harnessed with a Sri Lankan identity transcending socio-economic, religious, ethnic, and linguistic differences. The deployed forces in the field can make a positive impact on the whole government efforts in promoting socio-cultural and political stability.

#### K. Protecting Ecological Balance and Enhanced Ability for Disaster Mitigation.

This aspect of national security seeks to support development that is environmentally sustainable for the benefit of the nation and the people who depend on it. As the country sustains its economic growth, there is a clear indication that the ecological balance is being threatened by natural calamities and other man-made destructive activities. The environment, with its life support systems, is in a position to sustain and secure development for the benefit both of the present and future Sri Lankan generations. Ecological balance is a shared responsibility of all Sri Lankans, as individuals, families, and communities. Sri Lanka Army plays an important role in addressing these concerns with preventive actions such as reforestation, coast conservation, etc as well as assisting authorities in disaster mitigation whenever country faces such calamities.

### Conclusion

Peace is where there is quiet and serenity, no conflicts within or without. Also we can define peace as a stress free environment, state of security and calmness that comes when there's no fighting or war, everyone coexisting in perfect harmony and freedom. Harmony is when there is resonance and joy, celebration and sharing with others in peace. Sri Lanka as a democratic country is committed to world peace and the preservation of world order. National security is engendered and sustained through harmonious relations with our neighbors and allies. For this purpose, it is for the enduring interest of the country to forge harmonious engagement and relationship with other nations. The country and people must pursue constructive and cordial relations with all nations and peoples, and are free from any control, interference or threat of aggression from any of them.

National Security has a direct impact on holistic national growth and economic development of a state. As a developing country, Sri Lanka has a number of challenges to overcome for long term economic development. We need Economic Stability, and continuous foreign investment and new economic ventures. Development of infrastructure facilities of the country and rural development are also important in the path of sustainable economic development. Above all enhancing domestic security will require national reconciliation and the forging of a common Sri

Lankan identity. Ultimately, the best way to ensure that Sri Lanka remains safe and strong in the future is for its citizens to put aside the differences of the past, unite as Sri Lankans, and work towards better future for themselves and their fellow people. All these require peaceful environment Sri Lanka Army, being the land forces engaging with people at the grass roots, has an active role to play in ensuring holistic growth and security of the nation.

### Author Biography



Major General Ruwan Wanigasooriya is a career military officer of the Sri Lanka Army who at present serves as Commandant Sri Lanka Army Volunteer Force, Colonel

Commandant Regiment of Artillery and Chairman Army Cricket Committee. He is a proud product of Ananda College, Colombo and was commissioned to Sri Lanka Artillery on 24 July 1986 after successful military training in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. During his career, he has served in numerous Command, Staff and Instructional appointments at various levels.