

Fostering Growth by Ensuring National Security – An Airman’s Perspective

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Introduction

Growth and National Security of a nation are intertwined; National Security underpins growth and without Security, growth may not be possible, whilst the lack of growth can impinge negatively on national security and vice versa. Both facets, Growth and National Security, are mutually inclusive, interdependent and essential for a country, each facet is dynamic in nature being driven by both external and internal factors and require constant review and reform to remain relevant and effective to a country. In addition, achieving sustainable growth whilst ensuring National Security is a complex task which needs a robust, rapid and continuous review process in place. For a democracy the added task of having to garner consensus across the spectrum of stakeholders responsible for growth and for ensuring national security of a country is also to be considered. Amongst the many stakeholders, the military of any country is a stakeholder in the process of ensuring national security. Though this is quite obvious, the role of the military in establishing a conducive environment for the growth of a country is less obvious.

A. What this paper hopes to achieve?

This paper attempts to trace the inter-relationship between National Security and Growth whilst exploring the roles undertaken by one arm of the Sri Lanka Military; the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF), to ensure National Security. It also explores how these roles contribute to the creation of a conducive environment for growth, describing how the SLAF’s evolving peacetime role becomes part of the holistic approach to national growth and security of Sri Lanka.

B. What is Growth and What is Holistic Growth?

Growth is defined in Economics as the “increase in the market value of the goods and services produced by an economy over time and is measured as the percentage rate of increase in the real gross domestic product (GDP).” No two countries are the same, and equally neither are their economies and growth rates. Many comparisons are made between two countries, but often these comparisons fail to acknowledge the fact that countries differ from each other in their economic growth due to a number of factors which include: “growth of productivity, demographics, labor force participation, human capital, inequality, trade, quality of life, and employment rate”

Whilst there are numerous benefits or positives to be realized from the economic growth of a country such as increased productivity, increase in power, etc. there is also the concern of the negatives of growth as well. These are identified as “resource depletion, environmental impact and (non)-equitable growth.”

However, Stuart Kursch (Kursch, 2020) argues that based on present day methods of extraction of resources, action taken to reduce the toll on the environment will restrict rate of depletion of the resource itself. This leaves environmental safeguards and equitable growth to be ensured when pursuing economic growth.

In this backdrop it will be seen that though economic growth alone could bring dividends in the short run, unless the negatives which it develops are taken care of, such growth could be counterproductive in the long term. Thus, sustainable growth could be defined as equitable growth which is armed with a mechanism to reduce the impact on the environment.

John Dernbach (Dernbach 2003) however warned that this wasn’t easy stating that “The biggest challenge for sustainable development in coming

decades would be to operationalize it: to make it occur or to make an effective transition towards it, in communities, places and businesses all over the world.” Whilst the experiences of the past two decades appear to his prediction it also brings about a realization that for sustainable growth to be achieved, all stakeholders; both governmental and non-governmental, involved with driving the economy and those involved in mitigation of the impact of the negatives of growth, need to be identified and co-opted. This approach of identifying and co-opting stakeholders could be termed as all-inclusive approach to growth. Thus, an all-inclusive approach to sustainable growth could be termed as being a holistic approach towards growth.

C. What is Meant by National Security?

The term national security has been defined by many in different ways, and countries define National Security in their own unique way based on their perceived levels of threats, opportunities, strengths and weaknesses.

In the Nigerian context of 2014, National Security is defined as being “an appropriate and aggressive blend of political resilience, human resources, economic structure and capacity, technological competence, industrial base, availability of natural resources and of course the military might.”

Whilst Iranian author Maryam Ashghari (Ashghari, 2017) defines National Security as being a “State where the unity, wellbeing, values, and beliefs, democratic process, mechanism of governance and welfare of the nation and her people are perpetually improved and secured through military, political and economic resources.”

However this definition by the International Security Sector Advisory Team is deemed the most appropriate generic position on which to base the rest of the arguments on “A National Security Strategy or Policy (NSS or NSP) is a key framework for a country to meet the basic needs and security

concerns of citizens, and address external and internal threats to the country.”

National Security in The Sri Lankan Context

No doubt shaped by the events of the internal conflict in Sri Lanka, Dr Vernon Mendis (Mendis,1992) has defined it as being “the safeguarding of the territorial and sovereign independence and identity of a state from invasion, occupation and acquisition by a foreign power. It also means the protection of the government in power against internal subversion and insurrection, seeking to overthrow it by unlawful means.”

This definition of national security did fit that of Sri Lanka especially during the years of conflict. However, in today’s globalized world, ten years after the end of the internal conflict, with numerous changes in the regional and global geopolitical environment it is apparent that Sri Lanka needs to move to a more comprehensive definition of national security.

From the Sri Lankan National Policy Framework published in December 2019 the following National Security Policy statement of Sri Lanka could be envisaged as being:

“Striving to inculcate a productive citizenry, a contented family, a disciplined and just society and a prosperous nation giving due consideration to socio, economic, environmental and political aspects whilst safeguarding National Security without compromising the democratic space available to our people.”

Interconnectivity Between National Security and Growth

Unbridled growth on its own could have a negative impact on national security. Supporting this claim, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute states that “In an increasingly interconnected and complex world, it has become clear that security and development are inextricably linked, especially in least-developed

countries. Threats to security can have socio-economic roots, including contests over natural resources, spillover effects of environmental degradation, economic and social inequalities, economic and political migration, and natural disasters, among others.

Highlighting the need to assure Human Security to avoid conflict which would impede growth, it goes on to state that “For over 20 years, development has been linked to security through the concept of human security. The relationship can be complex: lagging development can lead to grievance, and conflict can threaten development.”

Confirming this importance of ensuring human security in order to achieve growth, Guy Ryder and Richard Samans (Ryder, Saman 2019), conclude that the increasing inequality and insecurity is brought about due to the transformation of work and emphasize the need to re-invigorate economic growth whilst developing the human resources to adapt to this transformation, stating that “In this new era, government and business leaders need to view the relationship between growth and labor markets the other way around. It is by upgrading their social contracts and better equipping their citizens to navigate the world of work that countries can most effectively boost their economic growth and development”

In this backdrop, Mariam Ashgary (Ashgary, 2017) researching in the context of Persian Gulf countries concludes that “National security is essential to growth, necessary to develop a country’s security in all sectors of the economy, and links a country with the global economy and ensures competitiveness.”

The Role of an Air Force in Ensuring National Security

In order to achieve the end state conceptualised by the National Security Policy, a National Security Strategy is required and to implement this strategy a government will have at its disposal a number of Instruments of Power (IOP). The 7 IOPs designated by the acronym DIME-FIL is used in

the at figure 1 below to demonstrate how Air Strategy executed by an Air Force flows down from the National Security Policy.

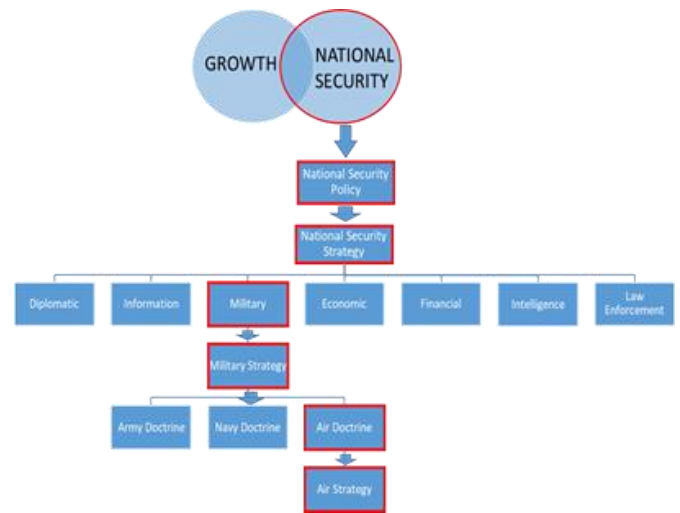


Figure 1. Conceptualizing National Security Linkage to Air Strategy

Challenges to the Traditional Operations Undertaken by the Military

Traditionally, the more affluent nations relied on a mechanism separate from its armed forces for response to internal security threats, be them man-made or natural. However, since 9/11 even the US Air Force has understood the need to use available and trained resources to counter such threats and in its classifications of the Range of Military Operations has included Homeland Operations which cover the use of military for response to natural and industrial disasters, terrorist attacks, civil disturbances and support for selected law enforcement activities.

Smaller nation states with limited resources have equally, traditionally called upon its armed force to supplement state establishments for restoration of normalcy due to disasters and disturbances. Thus, the Air Forces of small nations would find themselves undertaking a gamut of operations some of which may very well fall outside its traditional definition of Air Strategy.

The Sri Lanka Air Force and National Security

Similarly, the Sri Lanka Air Force too, since its inception, been called upon to undertake roles in support of National Security which are outside its classic role. The SLAF Doctrine of 2018 attempts to encompass these roles by bringing them under the realm of operations under the Air Strategy. However, there is slight confusion in how the ground roles, not in support of air operations conducted by the SLAF could contribute to the following argument takes this concept further in an attempt to bring more clarity and justify how the full gamut of operations presently undertaken by the SLAF comes under the Air Strategy employed to ensure National Security.

Whilst the SLAF defines Air Strategy as “the process of coordinating the development, deployment and employment of Air Power assets to achieve national security objectives”, in today’s context it would appear that the term Air Power Assets has become all-inclusive and also refers to ground assets of the SLAF which are traditionally used for combat support roles..

VFor ease of assimilation, the operations being conducted as part of the Air Strategy to ensure National Security have been classified into 4 subsets:

Classic Air Operations; Defensive Counter Air Operations, Maritime Air Operations, Air Surveillance Operations & Air Transport Operations. These classical air operations continue to-date in support of National Security of Sri Lanka. Whilst Air Defence is a 24/7 task which is rarely seen, the latest Maritime Air Operation conducted jointly with the Navy saw it fair share and more of publicity. Air Surveillance operations continue directly in support of the National Security conducting anti-narcotics operations, maritime reconnaissance and environmental surveys, whilst Transport Operations continue providing airlift for national requirements of critical infrastructure/machinery over inhospitable terrain.

Cyber Security Operations. Hitherto relegated as a combat support operation, Cyber Security Operations have now come of age, gaining

recognition as an independent operation of the SLAF Air Strategy and supports the National Cyber Security effort as well.

Aid to Civil Power, Nation Building and HADR Operations –Air Role. Since 2016 the SLAF has participated in UN mandated peacekeeping missions in CAR and South Sudan, strengthening Sri Lanka’s commitment to preserving international peace. SLAF maintains a readiness to respond to Humanitarian crisis and natural Disasters. A few notable HADR Air Operations were those conducted during the Floods of Colombo in 2016, the Landslides at Aranayake in April 2016 and during the Meetotamulla Garbage dump collapse in May 2017. In the Nation Building role the SLAF conducted a Seed Bombing campaign in 2019/2020 in aid of the National re-forestation program, In the Aerial Diplomacy cum overseas HADR role the SLAF played a key role bringing relief to foreign civilians and at the same time global recognition to Sri Lanka on numerous occasions; The airlifting of critical supplies to the Maldives during its water purification crisis of 2014, airlifting rescue teams and supplies to Nepal and evacuating civilians to safety in April 2015, airlifting of emergency supplies to Pakistan in the aftermath of the earthquake of 2015 are examples.

Aid to Civil Power, Nation Building and HADR Operations –Ground Role. Availability of skilled human resources and capabilities coupled with the changes in scenario led the SLAF to commit ground troops traditionally tasked with performing combat and general support roles in support of Air Operations to support of nation building and as aid to civil power.

Developing the civil aviation infrastructure reconstruction of the runway at Iranamandu in 2014 and the renovation of the Batticaloa runway in 2017 are examples of the ground element in the nation building role.

Whilst in the Aid to Civil Power role, the controlling of 4 ground security sectors in the Colombo, Negombo and Kalutara districts in the aftermath of the 2019 Easter Sunday bombing has required the SLAF to perform supporting

operations in the ground role in assistance of the Police.

In addition, the SLAF has also been tasked with the security to the two main international airports; the BIA and the MIA where it also performs a multitude of security cum support roles including the immediate response to emergencies and the very operational role in the CBRNE, role all of which are labour and ground intensive. Though no aircraft are deployed in support of this task, there is a sizable commitment of Human and material resources which continues to-date.

The outbreak of the CoViD 19 pandemic in 2020 has also seen the SLAF participate in a myriad of

tasks in support of Civil Authorities sans the use of air power: civil construction of hospitals and wards, manufacturing of PPE, repairing, designing and manufacturing medical equipment for use of National Hospitals to establishing and maintaining quarantine centres for civilians in aid of the Department of Health Services of Sri Lanka are some of the tasks undertaken by the SLAF.

In order to summarize the above discussion, the following diagram which shows all subsets of Air, Ground and Support operations presently being conducted in Sri Lanka also shows their link to Air Strategy, and thereby to National Security.

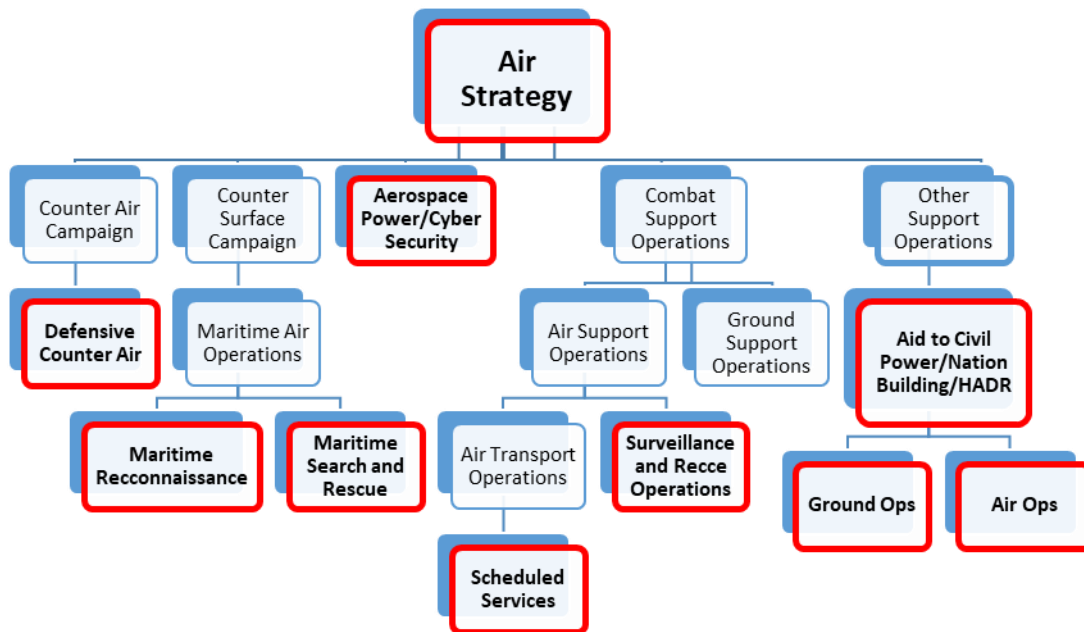


Figure 2. Air Strategy and related Air Operations

Conclusion

Using a simple definition that sustainable growth was growth which addresses the negatives of inequity and environmental impact, and that the inclusion of all stakeholders who could address the negatives was an all-inclusive approach to growth, this paper defined the term all-inclusive approach to sustainable growth as being a holistic approach towards growth. It further went on to describe the inter-relationship between National

Security and Growth of a nation and elaborated on the operations undertaken by the SLAF in the present context flow from National Security Strategy which in turn articulates the National Security Policy which is the blue print for ensuring National Security of a nation. Thus whilst articulating an Airman’s perspective in fostering growth by ensuring national security, this paper has a few lessons learnt which should be taken note of for the future.

of National Security can be expected to continue in the future as well.

Lessons Learnt

Whilst air operations such as HADR, both in country and abroad, receives media attention and is the visible side of SLAF air operations conducted in support of national security, critical air operations such as Air Defence of Sri Lanka which is a 24/7 operation rarely gets noticed in the public's eye as does the SLAF's peace keeping air operations presently being conducted in two countries in the African continent.

The SLAF's doctrine evolves, like a doctrine should, based on the environment and capabilities and circumstances have decreed that a number of non-aircraft centric operations have been adopted in support of National Security. A country which has sparse resources should utilise its capabilities in the most appropriate manner.

The SLAF is able to continue its classic role and still perform additional roles in support of civil administration, both in air and on ground, on demand, in times of national need due to the availability of a disciplined, available, multi-skilled and willing Human Resource.

Unless there is an expansion in terms of capability, willingness and professionalism in other sectors of the government, the present non-traditional ground roles undertaken by the SLAF in support

Author Biography



Air Vice Marshal Andrew Wijesuriya was born on 24th November 1966. He received his primary and secondary education at St Peter's College, Colombo and the Colombo International School with a very short stint at St Paul's school Darjeeling, India in-between. He joined the Sri Lanka Air Force as an Officer Cadet of the 16th Intake of Officer Cadets on 5th May 1986 and was commissioned in the rank of Pilot Officer on 27th December 1987 in the Technical Engineering Branch. He holds a Diploma in Quality Management from the Sri Lanka Standards Institute, a Master's degree (Defence Studies) in Management from the Kotelawala Defence Academy, Sri Lanka, a Master's degree in Defence Studies from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka having completed Staff College with the No 1 Defence Services Command and Staff Course at Sapugaskanda, Sri Lanka. He also holds a master's degree in Military Operational Art and Science from the Air University, Alabama, USA and a master's degree in National Security and War Studies from the National Defence University, Islamabad Pakistan.