

# ISAS Working Paper

No. 67 – Date: 16 June 2009

469A Bukit Timah Road  
#07-01, Tower Block, Singapore 259770  
Tel: 6516 6179 / 6516 4239  
Fax: 6776 7505 / 6314 5447  
Email: [isassecc@nus.edu.sg](mailto:isassecc@nus.edu.sg)  
Website: [www.isas.nus.edu.sg](http://www.isas.nus.edu.sg)



## Can Indian Think Tanks and Research Institutions Cope with the Rising Demand for Foreign and Security Policy Research?<sup>1</sup>

Sanjaya Baru<sup>2</sup>

I sincerely believe that in the modern world, the relationship between governments is increasingly mediated through and influenced by the relationship between civil society and the business community. It is on the foundation of people-to-people and business-to-business relations that we in government try to build state-to-state relations.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh  
Sixth India-European Union Business Summit  
New Delhi, India  
7 September 2005

India's relations with the rest of the world are increasingly being shaped by its economic and business interests.<sup>3</sup> While the state remains the primary and decisive player in the shaping and articulation of Indian foreign policy, India's international relations are no longer constrained by government-to-government relations. Business and civil society engagement are in fact forcing the government to re-examine its own priorities and prejudices.<sup>4</sup>

The outward orientation of the Indian economy since the early 1990s, the growing interest of Indian business in global markets, India's increased economic engagement with her Asian neighbours, the increasing economic value of inward remittances of income by Indian workers and professionals working in diverse regions, ranging from the Persian Gulf to the United States, have increased business and civil society interest in international relations. This, in turn, has stimulated demand for international relations expertise outside the government. However, inadequate investment in international relations training and a paucity

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the workshop on "Upgrading International Studies in India" in Singapore on 25-26 March 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Sanjaya Baru is a Visiting Research Professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore. He can be reached at [spsb@nus.edu.sg](mailto:spsb@nus.edu.sg).

<sup>3</sup> For an elaboration of this argument, see Sanjaya Baru, *The Strategic Consequences of India's Economic Performance*, Academic Foundation, Delhi (2006)/Routledge, New York (2007)/Citic Press, Beijing (2008).

<sup>4</sup> See Sanjaya Baru, 'India and the World – Economics and Politics of the Manmohan Singh Doctrine', ISAS Working Paper No. 53, November 2008. Available at: <http://www.isasnus.org/events/workingpapers/52.pdf>.

of institutional support for policy-oriented expertise have limited the supply of international relations expertise in non-governmental think tanks.<sup>5</sup>

It is in recognition of this state of affairs that an expert committee (chaired by Mr. K Subrahmanyam) constituted by the Indian Ministry of Defence to set up an Indian National Defence University (INDU), concluded that professional expertise in India on strategic affairs, international relations and national security was limited and required further development.<sup>6</sup>

The INDU Committee identified the problem as both one of a 'lack of demand' for such expertise and the inadequate 'supply' of 'relevant' expertise. The Committee noted that 'area' specialists in India for areas considered India's key strategic concern such as China and Pakistan, and countries/regions of special interest to India such as the United States, Southeast Asia, East Asia, West Asia and Africa were few and not adequately funded. The Committee also noted that, in many cases, the real experts were now retired professors and retired diplomats while there were very few young scholars and fresh PhDs in these areas.

The Committee echoed an earlier finding of the National Security Advisory Board (2000) that India should create new research centres for the study of China and Pakistan. In short, the INDU Committee emphasised the importance of augmenting the 'supply' of expertise in international relations and strategic affairs.

The INDU Committee also felt that the 'supply constraint' was to a great extent due to the perceived 'lack of demand'. Bright young students were not attracted to disciplines such as international relations and strategic affairs because of limited career opportunities.<sup>7</sup> In fact, a large number of such students opted for careers in the permanent civil service or media and not in research. Hence, adequate specialisation, especially in area and foreign language studies, had not developed. Unless adequate 'demand' is created for such specialised know-how in these areas, career opportunities would not be available to attract researchers into the field.

The Committee also felt the government could take the first step by investing in an institution that would at once create demand for such talent and augment supply. While hoping there would be adequate 'private sector' demand in time to create a sizeable market for such expertise, the Committee underscored the need for 'relevant' expertise, that is, expertise which would be of 'use' to both the government and the private sector. It was felt that the

---

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the growing interest of Indian business in foreign policy, see Sanjaya Baru, 'The Growing Influence of Business and Media on Indian Foreign Policy', Paper presented at *Conference on the Future of India's Foreign Policy*, Centre for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, 18-19 April 2008. To be published in *India Review*, Frank Cass, (forthcoming). Also available as an ISAS Insights No. 49, February 2009, at: <http://www.isasnus.org/events/insights/50.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> I was a member of the INDU Committee. It was constituted in May 2001 by the Union Defence Minister. The final report was submitted in 2003. The Committee visited the campuses of the United States and Chinese National Defense University in Washington D. C. and Beijing and based its recommendations on the experience and example of these two institutions and taking into account available institutional infrastructure and expertise in India.

<sup>7</sup> Subrahmanyam recalls that, in the late 1960s, when he asked K. N. Raj, then Director of the Delhi School of Economics, to depute an economist who could work at the IDSA on defence economics and security issues, Raj told him that he would not advise any economist to get into a field in which data was not easily available. Subrahmanyam says even today this is the biggest drawback for research in the area. The unwillingness of the government to share at least some information with researchers, as is done in the United States.

‘quality of research’ in most universities in India was not matching the ‘nature of demand’ since there was a ‘disconnect’ between the two. Academic researchers lived either in their ‘intellectual ivory towers’ or adopted purely ideological postures with no appreciation of ground reality and *real politik*.

One of the INDU Committee members, who was from the private sector, observed that Indian businesses were increasingly looking for expertise in both area studies and strategic affairs because they were beginning to invest outside India, and global events were increasingly influencing their business and shaping their business environment. He felt there would be increasing private sector demand for area studies, international relations and strategic affairs. While this would encourage private sector investment in the future, in the interregnum, there would have to be public investment in the creation of expertise. Finally, the Committee felt the expected increase in investment in think tanks and research institutions would come up against the constraint of a shortage of researchers and experts; hence, the urgency to ‘create’ such talent. With this objective in view, the Committee recommended the creation of the INDU.

It has taken a long time for the government to set up the INDU but it has finally decided to do so, though turf wars continue on its location and staffing.<sup>8</sup> According to the office of the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff, the INDU’s vision will be as follow:<sup>9</sup>

- a) It “must be and perceived to be a centre of excellence and innovation for policy-oriented research and teaching on national strategic issues.”
- b) It will be “a multi-disciplinary organisation with information age security leaders as its alumni.”
- c) “Aspects of joint services and civil departmental operations along with resource management, acquisition, information and technology strategies [are to be] the focus of enquiry and learning leading to conceptualisations and assessments of [the] grand strategy. [The] grand strategy is the plan by which all elements of the nation’s power are used in support of its security objectives.”
- d) It must have “an educational system where national security managers in the Services and outside the Services understand each other’s objectives and compulsions and establish personal relationships.”
- e) “The accent of [the] University [is] to be marked by [the] commitment to open and free enquiry and scholarly debate. In return for freedom and autonomy, the University will dedicate itself to systematic, rigorous and critical enquiry.”

---

<sup>8</sup> Turf wars between the civil and defence staff, between the ministries and between state governments have held back the launch of the INDU. While the Committee wanted the INDU located in New Delhi, with branch campuses in Hyderabad and Bangalore, the Punjab and Haryana governments lobbied for long for the campus to be located in their states. See Pinaki Bhattacharya, ‘National Defence University still in pipeline’, *Mail Today*, 15 February 2009. [http://www.itgo.in/content\\_mail.php?option=com\\_content&name=print&id=23635](http://www.itgo.in/content_mail.php?option=com_content&name=print&id=23635).

<sup>9</sup> The website of the Integrated Defence Staff of India <<http://ids.nic.in>> Reports the Constitution of the Subrahmanyam Committee and its Key Recommendations. <http://ids.nic.in/dot/dot.htm>.

- f) It will “serve as a think tank contributing to policy formulation and debates on security and strategy.”

If the INDU has to fulfill Objectives (e) and (f), it must function as a truly ‘autonomous’ institution, though guided by senior functionaries of the government and defence forces. Its institutional leadership and faculty must comprise ‘experts’, even if they have a service background, and not transferable officials on deputation from the government. However, to build such an institution, the government will have to inspire and instill confidence in the experts in the field to join it and provide world class leadership. Here, the experience in the field of international relations and strategic affairs stands in marked contrast to that in economic policy.

### **Supply and Demand in Economic Policy and Research**

The inadequate development of expertise in the disciplines of international relations and strategic policy, both publicly funded and privately funded, stands in contrast to the excess supply of talent in economic policy. From the time of independence, India has invested in creating both the supply of and the demand for professional expertise in economics and statistical methods. The legacy of institution-building and the generation of expertise in economics also stand in marked contrast to that in the subject areas of international relations. Perhaps one important reason for this could be the fact that India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, considered himself an expert on international affairs while a novice on economic issues.

Nehru dominated thinking on Indian foreign policy in the 1950s but reached out to experts on economic policy and helped create new research institutions. The Planning Commission was itself a ‘think tank’. It was guided by the statistician, Professor P. C. Mahalanobis, who set up the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), and had the guidance of economists like V. K. R. V. Rao and K. N. Raj who set up the Delhi School of Economics (DSE). For its part, the private sector stepped in and partly funded the National Council of Applied Economics Research (NCAER). Subsequently, the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG) was also set up. Between them, the Planning Commission, the ISI, the DSE, the NCAER and the IEG produced a generation of economists who manned the policy-making institutions of the government and imparted a high degree of professionalism and intellectual independence to governmental thinking on economic policy. Apart from the DSE, departments of economics and statistics in universities across the country, including those in Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Andhra Pradesh and Osmania, created an army of economists and econometricians.

While the supply of researchers was augmented by public funding of such institutions, the demand stimulus also came from the government. The Planning Commission, the State Statistical Bureaus and the planning departments hired economists. Key economic ministries had ‘economic advisors’ who did not belong to the permanent civil service, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). That is how economists such as I. G. Patel, K. N. Raj, I. S. Gulati, K. S. Krishnaswamy, S. R. Sen, Manmohan Singh, Ashok Mitra and A. Vaidyanathan entered the government. They followed an earlier generation of trained economists who included Rao and C. D. Deshmukh, and were followed by subsequent generations of economists such as Bimal Jalan, Arjun Sengupta, Montek Ahluwalia, Vijay Kelkar, Shankar Acharya and Jayanto Roy. Apart from the Planning Commission, the Reserve Bank of India, the Union finance, commerce, industries and agriculture ministries also hired professional economists. Professional economists also worked with those in the government in a variety

of ways, including short stints in the government and membership of policy-making bodies and committees of enquiry. These included such economists as Amartya Sen, Jagdish Bhagwati, P. R. Brahmananda, V. M. Dandekar, B. S. Minhas, Dantwala, D. T. Lakdawala, Raja Chelliah, C. Rangarajan, A. M. Khusro and Y. K. Alagh.

It is also important to note that these Indian economists were not insulated from the outside world. Rather, many of them maintained professional links with academic institutions around the world. More to the point, they interacted closely with other professionals, including experts in their field from around the world. The Planning Commission saw a steady stream of 'foreign experts' coming and working there, including the likes of Milton Friedman, Nicholas Kaldor, Joan Robinson, Charles Bettelheim and Daniel Thorner.<sup>10</sup> In the 1950s, Nehru interacted with most of these professionals, both Indian and foreign. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi also continued that tradition. She brought in such economists as P. N. Dhar and Arjun Sengupta into the Prime Minister's office.

The close interaction between the economists in the government with those in the universities, research institutions and think tanks raised the profile of the discipline across the country. Thus, even before private sector demand for trained economists emerged, the government demand fuelled the supply of such professionals. Hence, in the discipline of economics and the realm of economic policy-making, the supply and demand of professionals and research expertise remained in step with each other. The growth of the private sector in the 1980s and after, and the growing demand for economic expertise in the private sector only accelerated this trend.

Apart from domestic sources of public and private funding, research institutes and think tanks in economics have also benefitted from liberal external funding. Economic policy-makers have not been averse to receiving policy advice from institutions and individuals who are funded by foreign sources, be they multilateral (the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, etc.) or private foundations. By their very nature, the Indian foreign and strategic policy establishment would be wary of externally-funded research, and often for good reason. Hence, while economic policy research has increasingly benefitted from external sources of funding, this avenue is not an easy option to take for international relations and strategic affairs institutions.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the tradition of the lateral movement of economists between the government and research institutions enabled the profession to undertake relevant and meaningful policy-oriented research.

The high public profile of professionals in the field, both at home and abroad, and improved job prospects and remunerations for younger professionals have made economics an attractive discipline for talented students and researchers. It would seem the absence of both incentives, apart from the relative shortage of public and private sector demand, and sources of funding have limited the supply of talent in foreign and security policy.

---

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of western economists working with the Indian government on policy issues, see Rosen, George, *Western Economists and Eastern Societies: Agents of Change in South Asia, 1950-70*. Oxford University Press, 1985.

<sup>11</sup> There has been a criticism in India that the research budget of the Indian Council of Social Science Research and other funding sources in the social sciences has not kept pace with the demand for funding and that this gap has been increasingly bridged by foreign funding. For a large number of reputed institutions in the social sciences, foreign funding has for a long time been more than domestic funding. The increasing 'bureaucratism' of funding organisations has also forced institutions to seek more liberal external assistance to more intrusive domestic sources.

## The Supply-Demand Gap in Foreign and Security Policy

As stated earlier, in the Nehruvian era, much was done to induct professionals into economic policy-making, and to invest in the creation of economic research institutes and training institutions. There was no such parallel effort in foreign and strategic policy. In the field of international relations and strategic affairs, Nehru did induct specialists into the government in the initial years but this was sporadic and whimsical. The direct recruitment of professionals who did not belong to the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) into the foreign service ceased by the end of the 1950s.<sup>12</sup> While institutions such as the Indian School for International Studies, later the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, and the Indian Council of World Affairs were created, their influence on policy-making was limited. (See Annex 1 for the full list.)

The very first initiative to set up a policy think tank in the field of strategic and foreign policy was taken only in 1965, three years after the war with China and, more importantly, after Nehru's death, when the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) was set up. In sharp contrast to the on-going turf war on the INDU and the now widespread practice of appointing retired IAS and IFS officers as heads of government-funded research institutions and think tanks, the IDSA was fortunate to have a 'young' IAS officer, Subrahmanyam, with acknowledged expertise in strategic affairs, as its head.<sup>13</sup> Recounting his appointment as IDSA's director, B. G. Varghese reminds us that Subrahmanyam was by then already a member of a non-hierarchical 'think tank' of officials and non-officials that Varghese had put together as the Information Advisor to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to devise India's response to China's nuclear tests in 1966.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Individuals such as former President K. R. Narayanan, who was India's Ambassador to China and the United States, were directly recruited into the Foreign Service at a young age by Nehru. However, this practice ceased and only a few senior professors of the School of International Service would be offered diplomatic assignments almost as a retirement benefit at the fag end of their professional life. Unlike the economic ministries, the foreign ministry has never been open to the lateral induction of either international relations specialists or economists. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office has an economic policy division manned by economists. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs has resisted such an idea.

<sup>13</sup> His appointment was, however, a happenstance and had to be renewed every year for seven years. I have described Subrahmanyam as the "Bhishmapithamaha" of the Indian strategic policy community. See my tribute in C. Uday Bhaskar (Ed.) *A Bouquet of Tributes to K Subrahmanyam at 75*", New Delhi, 2004. He has also been described as India's "Henry Kissinger".

<sup>14</sup> B. G. Varghese, 'The Legend that is K Subrahmanyam', October 2004. Available at: <http://www.rediff.com/news/2004/oct/05spec1.htm>

To quote Varghese, "I first got to know Subbu in 1966, soon after joining the Prime Minister's office as information adviser. On May 9, 1966, within three months of Indira Gandhi taking office as prime minister, China conducted its third nuclear test and the PM was called upon to make a statement in Parliament. This revealed the absence of any clear policy. This led me to suggest the need to set up a group that might spell out the political, security, technological and economic aspects of a national nuclear policy.

I thereupon invited a small group a week later for a brainstorming session over lunch. But who could speak from the defence angle? Someone named a bright deputy secretary in the defence ministry, K Subrahmanyam. And so it was that I contacted him. Others present were Homi Sethna, Director of BARC [Bhabha Atomic Research Centre], Bombay, Pitamber Pant of the Planning Commission, S. Gopal from the MEA [Ministry of External Affairs], Romesh Thapar, the journalist – then close to Indira Gandhi, and myself.

Sethna talked about the wherewithal and costs and gave a time estimate for a nuclear test and development of a delivery system within a period of five years. Subbu and Gopal believed that reliance on any US nuclear guarantee to India would steadily diminish as China's capability increased. Pitamber was concerned about the cost of an Indian nuclear programme even after offsetting the technological gains. We dispersed after agreeing to put together a paper, with

The IDSA has recently been listed as Asia's third most influential think tank.<sup>15</sup> While the IDSA was funded by the Ministry of Defence, it took another two decades for the Ministry of External Affairs to fund its own think tank. Literally implementing a resolution of the New Delhi Non-Aligned Summit, 1983, to set up "a research and information system for the non-aligned and other developing countries" based in New Delhi, the ministry created the RISNAODC. Now popularly called RIS (Research and Information System for Developing Countries), this institution is now the turf of the ministry's Economic Relations (ER) Division.<sup>16</sup>

While the IDSA acquired a high profile under Subrahmanyam's leadership, its influence on policy declined over the years. Neither the IDSA nor the RIS can be compared, in terms of the level of expertise available or influence on government policy, to similar research institutions in the field of economic policy-making, or to their counterparts in the United States or even China. The NCAER (funded largely by the Ministry of Finance), the Indian Council for Research in International Economic Relations (funded partly by the Commerce Ministry) and other economic research institutions have greater clout in economic policy-making than the IDSA and the RIS in foreign and security policy.<sup>17</sup>

This visible disconnect between policy-making and research in the fields of strategic affairs and international relations has hurt the public profile of experts in the field and prevented the

---

Sethna doing the technological part, Subbu covering the security dimensions and Gopal writing on the diplomatic implications.

I reported on the discussion to Mrs G. and L. K. Jha. At a meeting of the Atomic Energy Commission in Bombay a week later, at which (*Vikram*) Sarabhai was named the new chairman AEC [Atomic Energy Commission] and secretary department of Atomic Energy in place of the late Homi Bhabha, a tentative approval was given for a study of a nuclear weapons programme and missile system. Meanwhile, word somehow leaked of our informal luncheon group and the PM told me she had been accosted by (*The Hindu's*) G. K. Reddy and Inderjit after a press conference and asked when our 'committee' would submit its 'report'! By then, however, the matter had formally passed into official hands.

Subbu may recall these events that played a part in launching him into what became a career path in the area of nuclear, security and strategic studies that he has since dominated. His induction as head of the newly established IDSA [Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses] from 1968 to 1972 and again from 1980 to 1987 enabled him to add scholarship and depth to his in-house knowledge and experience in this field. This was enriched by stints as home secretary Tamil Nadu, which gave him some exposure to matters of internal security, secretary, defence production, and chairman, Joint Intelligence Committee in between his IDSA years. The IDSA period also allowed him to study and visit abroad and to participate in Pugwash meetings, all of which sharpened his world view.

Nuclear issues were always contentious in India and for quite some time Subbu was rated a prime nuclear hawk. I too shared that view for a while but was gradually persuaded by his logic that the NPT [Non-Proliferation Treaty] and its affiliates made for an unequal and unfair world and that without a credible minimum deterrent of its own, India would never be able to grow to its full stature, being subject to a variety of pressures or nuclear blackmail. That forecast was indeed borne out by subsequent events."

<sup>15</sup> The Global 'Go-to Think Tanks' 2008, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, International Relations Program, University of Pennsylvania, <http://www.fpri.org/research/thinktanks/mcgann.globalgotothinktanks.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> The RIS gets a bulk of its funds from the MEA's Economic Relations (ER) Division. Hence, when the RIS celebrated its Silver Jubilee recently, the Secretary of ER, MEA, delivered the closing keynote address.

<sup>17</sup> As the Media Advisor to Prime Minister Singh, I had the same opportunity, as Varghese did in 1966, to bring together a group of 'experts' to advise the Prime Minister on such issues as nuclear policy, China, Pakistan and Kashmir. Each time, the Prime Minister asked me to put together a list of names and invite them for a discussion, I found my list comprising a diverse set of people from across the country and many disciplines, including the media, but none from either the IDSA or the RIS.

creation of professional icons. This is a necessary pre-requisite for making disciplines attractive to young students. Students opting for economics, for example, have icons in the public domain whose career and policy influence encourage them to choose that field for their own career. In the field of strategic and foreign policy, such icons as Subrahmanyam are an exception rather than the rule. The younger generation of international relations and strategic affairs experts, and there are many highly talented ones, have not had the same opportunity that young economists still do of being in the government, adding their scholarly weight to policy-making and acquiring policy experience that in turn adds depth to their scholarship.

Officials in government argue, for their part, that the “so-called experts are far too theoretical in their approach, unwilling to be realists, and that area studies experts have very little ground level understanding of their areas”. One diplomat said to me, “[F]ew area study scholars in India understand the language of the country they study. A young diplomat picks up the language in six months but these experts don’t do so even over a lifetime.”

There is, however, a ‘chicken-and-egg’ problem here. The paucity of funding and limited career options limit the investment scholars are willing to make in acquiring area expertise, the number of ‘field trips’ they can make, and the number of years they can live in and devote to an area. These limitations, in turn, reduce their relevance to policy makers. What policy-makers in the external affairs and defence ministries do not seem to realise is that while “internal expertise” may exist, permanent civil servants may tailor their judgments to suit the prejudices and needs of their bosses and are unwilling to think out of the box. That is precisely where outside expertise helps and the supply of such expertise is growing.

The real problem in building a body of informed thinking in international relations and strategic affairs is the non-availability of authentic information. Economic policy-makers in India have ensured the production and publication of authentic official data on the economy. Over the years, the central bank and the key economic ministries have become transparent in generating and publishing data. This has not happened in the realm of strategic affairs and foreign policy. Subrahmanyam says, “I remember explaining to the Director of Chatham House, who was on a visit, that the basic difference between [the] IDSA and [the] IISS [International Institute for Strategic Studies] is that the former gets all its money from the government but cannot get the time of the day from them, while the latter has to raise its own resources but gets all data and relevant information from government sources. Our senior bureaucrats have burdened themselves with so much of trivia because of the lack of a culture of delegation that they have no time to read such outside studies. Therefore, they have no use for them.”<sup>18</sup>

Subrahmanyam believes that unlike in the economic ministries, where bureaucrats have ceded power to the market and authentic information is available in the public domain, in the rest of the governmental system, especially in foreign and strategic affairs, bureaucrats continue to retain their relevance and power by withholding information to outside scholars and experts. Consequently, he says, when a non-governmental analyst comes up with a viewpoint unacceptable to the government, the bureaucracy dismisses it merely on the grounds that the viewpoint is not ‘grounded in reality’. With rising mediocrity in the Services, and the growing competence of outside experts, and with government service becoming a less attractive profession, confidentiality is often a mask for incompetence.

---

<sup>18</sup> Comments sent to the author via email, 18 February 2009.



Whatever the reasons, an important consequence of this disconnect between policy-making and research on the one hand, and constraints on supply of and demand for expertise on the other, has been the relative institutional under-development in strategic affairs and international relations as compared to economics. Without getting bogged down by the ‘chicken-and-egg’ issue of which side of the supply-demand equation to blame for this state of affairs, we would like to merely recognise this harsh reality.

### **Private Sector Think Tanks**

Domestic private sector funding for research in international relations and strategic affairs is relatively a new phenomenon in India. The most prominent fully privately-funded ‘think tank’ is the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), funded by Reliance Industries Ltd. Another prominent ‘think tank’, though much smaller in size and scope, is the Delhi Policy Group (DPG). While the DPG is essentially a ‘forum’ for discussion, the ORF has been conceived as a ‘think tank’ with full-time research staff but it is yet to establish itself and runs the risk of being viewed as a centre for retired government officials.<sup>19</sup> Outside New Delhi, there are as yet few good private sector think tanks, and fewer still that have made an impact on policy in New Delhi. Bangalore’s National Institute of Advanced Studies and Mumbai’s Strategic Foresight Group come to mind as two think tanks that have made an impact on policy and public discourse. Both have benefitted from their high profile leadership.

The two major associations of Indian businesses, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Confederation of Indian Industry have, over the past decade, funded research in international relations and strategic affairs, including the sponsorship of ‘Track Two’ dialogues and conferences. However, neither has invested in a think tank or research institute devoted to international relations and strategic affairs. Indeed, the private sector is yet to make any serious long-term investment in developing think tanks and research institutions in this field.

The inward-orientation of Indian businesses, notwithstanding their globalisation, especially in the information-technology sector, is most visible in their funding of research. Some business leaders have been willing to spend money abroad to buy policy advice but few are willing to invest as yet in long-term institution building in India in the fields of international relations and strategic policy.

A clutch of defence and strategic affairs think tanks have emerged in the recent past that have secured funding directly from the armed forces and/or the government and have been open to private sources of funding as well. These include the National Maritime Foundation and the Centre for Air Power Studies. Many of them are manned by retired government officials, diplomats and senior defence staff. Typically, these institutions are staffed at the top by retired officials or defence staff that are supported for research and other assistance by fresh post-graduates or young research scholars. The ORF, for example, is manned largely by senior citizens, with a few young researchers. Almost all of them have an absence of experienced or knowledgeable “middle-level” intellectual leadership. Hence, these

---

<sup>19</sup> One incident involving the ORF and RAND captures the former’s shortcoming. In 2004, I was invited by the ORF to participate in a discussion on a joint ORF-RAND research project. While the RAND team comprised mostly fresh PhDs who had just completed a thesis on an India-related topic, the Indian side was represented almost entirely (with the exclusion of C. Raja Mohan and myself) of retired diplomats and retired defence staff. Clearly, RAND was investing in the future; the ORF was drawing on past investment.

institutions draw on such expertise from universities or offer sabbatical to middle-level government officials who wish to take a break from regular service for a year or two.

An important phenomenon in India is the emergence of specialist talent in the media in the field of international relations and strategic policy. Senior editors like C. Raja Mohan, Manoj Joshi and Raj Chengappa have published learned papers and books in these fields. Their services are hired from time to time by some of these think tanks and research institutions, and they do have an influence on public policy.<sup>20</sup>

Many university students with a degree in international relations and an area studies background have joined the burgeoning Indian media in recent years, contributing to more-informed reporting and public discourse on foreign policy and strategic affairs. However, the so-called disconnect between an 'ivory tower' academia and the 'real world' of public policy-making and discourse persists. As long as the government resists the lateral entry of experts into the relevant ministries, this problem will remain.

### **Quantitative versus Qualitative Constraint**

So far, I have discussed the issue of 'supply and demand' largely in quantitative terms, that is, in terms of the availability of institutions, individuals and funds. The long list of institutions provided in Annex 1 to this paper would seem to suggest that there is not, in fact, any such 'quantitative' constraint. There are a large number of institutions, university departments and think tanks devoted to teaching and research in the fields of international relations and strategic affairs. Thus, why should there be a supply constraint?

The real supply constraint, it seems, is a 'qualitative' one – not necessarily in terms of the quality of teaching or research or even the quality of students, but in terms of its overall orientation and relevance for policy-making.

In the field of economics too, there is this problem. Many university departments have ceased to be centres of policy-oriented research. The early example of the DSE, where eminent economists did both research and teaching and were actively engaged in policy-making and advising policy-makers in the government, has not inspired many such examples across the country. Indeed, even the DSE has ceased to have such influence on policy any more. Rather, much of the policy-oriented research has moved to research institutions, including government funded research institutions. Thus the Indian Council of Social Science Research-funded institutes and the ministry-funded institutions such as the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy have generated enormous policy-oriented research. By contrast, as Annex 1 shows, in the field of international relations, university departments dominate over think tanks and research institutes but their engagement in policy is limited. Even think tanks and research institutes, including those funded by the government, have limited influence on policy-making.

An important reason for this, which we have already referred to, is the disconnect between the policy-making world and the world of research and teaching. Consider the example of the

---

<sup>20</sup> On the general influence of the media on foreign policy, see Sanjaya Baru, 'The Growing Influence of Business and Media on Indian Foreign Policy', Paper presented at *Conference on the Future of India's Foreign Policy*, Centre for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, 18-19 April 2008. To be published in *India Review*, Frank Cass, (forthcoming).

India-United States civil nuclear agreement. None of the institutions listed in Annex 1 played any significant role in shaping policy-making or the policy outcome. In the past, at least the IDSA would have played such a role. However, on this issue, even the IDSA was satisfied with offering its platform for some public lectures by policy-makers.<sup>21</sup>

The ‘qualitative’ constraint is one of attitudes and approaches. Existing think tanks and research institutions are not adequately ‘policy-oriented’. Equally, policy-makers are not willing to invest in institutions that can offer them informed policy advice. This intellectual disconnect between policy-makers and researchers is the biggest supply constraint in the field of foreign policy and security studies.

## **Conclusion**

What our analysis suggests is that India requires both a quantitative expansion of institutions and individuals engaged in research in international relations, area studies and strategic affairs, and, at the same time, a qualitative change in attitudes and approaches that can facilitate a meaningful dialogue between researchers and policy-makers, making for better informed and knowledge-based policy-making. The experience in the field of economic policy offers a good model for those engaged in the fields of international relations and strategic affairs to consider. The government should seriously consider the ‘lateral’ induction of high-quality professionals into the relevant ministries, including external affairs and defence. Institutions directly funded by these ministries must have access to declassified information to facilitate informed research, especially on past events.

Modern nations with long-term interests must have modern governmental systems that ensure stability and continuity in policy. In a democracy, societal memory is as important as institutional memory in shaping policy for the future. A large, diverse and plural democracy such as India, where governments come and go and new generations come to power, needs a ‘permanent establishment’ that has an informed memory and that can think about the future based on past experience and on-going research and analysis. That permanent establishment can no longer be only the permanent civil service. It must include an informed community of scholars and analysts.

An important policy measure the government can take to facilitate this is to make official documents available to researchers, with some reasonable time lag so that an informed body of expertise can be developed outside the government as well. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh underscored the importance of this when he said while releasing the memoirs of a former foreign secretary:

I refer to the importance that memoirs currently play in our effort to recall objectively events of the past for the future. I am aware that serious scholarship in India on government policy is hampered by a lack of access to

---

<sup>21</sup> When I was asked to organise a briefing for the members of parliament on the issue, I picked Subrahmanyam and G. Balachandran for the task. In the public domain and media, the intellectual debate was largely shaped by C. Raja Mohan, Manoj Joshi, Raj Chengappa, Karan Thapar and Siddharth Varadarajan. The only university professor who played an active role in the policy debate was Professor R. Rajaraman of JNU. The Centre for Policy Research’s Brahma Challaney and Bharat Karnad had no impact on policy-making but were influential in the political debates by offering debating points to the opposition. In the end, as far as the political debate was concerned, one statement from former President Abdul Kalam in favour of the nuclear agreement wiped out all the negatives put forth by these critics.

official documents. Several eminent scholars have mentioned this to me. In other democracies, after a specified period, scholars and researchers are given access to official papers. This has encouraged professional study of contemporary history and policy-making. In the absence of a policy on making government files publicly available, the best records we have of policy-making and thinking at the highest levels in government are to be found in personal memoirs of distinguished men and women in public life. I, therefore, welcome Jagat's contribution to our understanding of the major events in our recent history. However, I do hope that we do not have to depend only on memory and personal notes for a record of policy-making. I think the time has come for us to have at least a 50-year rule, if not a 30-year rule, that allows scholars and researchers free access to declassified official papers. I would like to have this issue examined so that we can take an early and informed decision. In the long run, this will make it possible for us to draw appropriate lessons from the past and make effective decisions for the future.<sup>22</sup>

Regrettably the government, in its wisdom, has so far not taken a decision to declassify old records. Hopefully, some day it will and thereby contribute to better informed research and policy-making.

### **Acknowledgment**

I am grateful to N. S. Sisodia, C. Raja Mohan, Muthiah Alagappa and the participants at the Singapore workshop for their comments on an earlier draft. I am grateful to Rama Goyal and Shanthie D'Souza for their assistance in putting together Annex 1. I am also grateful to Kishore Mahbubani and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore, for providing me the facilities that enabled me to write this paper.

oooOOOooo

---

<sup>22</sup> Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's remarks while releasing Jagat S. Mehta's book. "Negotiating for India: Resolving Problems through Diplomacy: Seven Case Studies, 1958-1978" (Manohar, 2006), <http://www.pmindia.nic.in/speeches.htm>.

**List of institutes and think tanks in India with a focus on international relations and strategic affairs**

**Aligarh**

1. Centre of West Asian Studies, Aligarh Muslim University\*
2. Centre for Strategic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University\*

**Bangalore**

3. National Institute of Advanced Studies \*^

**Chandigarh**

4. Centre for the Study of Geopolitics, Department of Political Science, Punjab University\*

**Chennai**

5. Chennai Centre for China Studies\*
6. Institute of Asian Studies^
7. Institute for Tropical Studies\*^
8. Centre for South & Southeast Asian Studies, University of Chennai\*
9. Department of Defence Studies, University of Chennai\*
10. South Asia Analysis Group\*^

**Delhi**

11. Academy of Third World Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia\*
12. Aspen Institute, India^
13. Centre for Peace Studies
14. Centre for Policy Research\*^
15. Centre for the Study of Developing Societies\*
16. Centre for Air Power Studies\*
17. Centre for Land Warfare Studies\*
18. Centre for West Asian Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia\*
19. Delhi Policy Group^
20. Department of Chinese and Japanese Studies, University of Delhi\*
21. Department of Political Science, University of Delhi\*
22. India Habitat Centre^
23. India International Centre^
24. Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations\*^
25. Indian Council of World Affairs\*
26. Indian Institute of Foreign Trade\*
27. Institute for Conflict Management\*^
28. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses\*
29. Institute for Human Development\*
30. Institute for International Relations
31. Centre for Studies in Globalisation, Institute of Economic Growth\*
32. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies\*^
33. Maulana Abul Kalam Institute of Asian Studies\*
34. National Council of Applied Economic Research\*^
35. National Foundation for India^
36. National Maritime Foundation\*^

37. Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Milia Islamia\*
38. Observer Research Foundation^
39. Rajiv Gandhi Foundation^
40. Research and Information System for the Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries\*
41. School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University\*
  - a. Centre for American and West European Studies
  - b. Centre for Diplomacy, International Law and Economics
  - c. Centre for East Asian Studies
  - d. Centre for International Politics, Organization & Disarmament
  - e. Centre for Russian, Central Asian & East European Studies
  - f. Centre for South, Central, Southeast Asian and Southwest Pacific Studies
  - g. Centre for West Asian and African Studies
42. Society for Indian Ocean Studies\*^
43. South Asia Analysis Group\*^
44. South Asian Centre for Strategic Studies\*
45. The Energy & Resources Institute^
46. The Institute of Chinese Studies\*
47. United Services Institute\*

#### **Goa**

48. Centre for Latin American Studies, University of Goa\*

#### **Hyderabad**

49. Centre for Area Studies (Urban Development and Regional Planning in the Indian Ocean Region), Osmania University\*
50. Centre for Asian Studies^

#### **Jaipur**

51. South Asia Studies Centre, University of Rajasthan\*

#### **Kolkata**

52. Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development\*
53. Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University\*
54. Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Calcutta\*
55. Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies\*

#### **Mumbai**

56. Strategic Foresight Group^
57. Centre for Central Eurasian Studies, University of Mumbai\*
58. Centre for African Studies, University of Mumbai\*

#### **Pondicherry**

59. School of International Studies, University of Pondicherry\*

#### **Pune**

60. Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, University of Pune\*

#### **Srinagar**

61. Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir\*

**Tirupati**

62. Centre for Studies on Indochina and South Pacific, Sri Venkateshwara University\*

**Varanasi**

63. Centre for the Study of Nepal, Faculty of Social Sciences, Benares Hindu University\*

**Visakhapatnam**

64. Centre for South Asian Studies, College of Arts, Commerce and Law, Andhra University\*

Note:

\* Fully government funded

^ Privately funded

\*^ Partly government and partly private