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**India's National
Capacity of Manoeuvre:
A Cross-Domain Strategic
Framework**

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Abstract

This paper examines India's national capacity to manoeuvre within an increasingly volatile and multipolar global order. Focusing on four critical pillars—diplomatic, cognitive, economic, and military—the study analyses how New Delhi secures strategic autonomy while advancing its sovereign interests. It explores India's multi-alignment strategies, the capacity to shape international narratives, the proactive leveraging of an expanding economic footprint, and the modernisation of its military deterrence framework. Ultimately, the paper provides a comprehensive blueprint for understanding how India can integrate these diverse domains to navigate geopolitical friction, mitigate systemic vulnerabilities, and effectively project power as a leading global actor.

Keywords: Manoeuvre, MDO, DIME, National Capacity, National Security, Operation

Sindoor

Introduction: Manoeuvre as a Cross-Domain Strategic Principle

The Evolution of the Manoeuvre Concept

The concept of manoeuvre has traditionally been confined to military doctrine, where it describes the movement of forces to gain a positional advantage over adversaries. Classical military theorists, from Sun Tzu to Carl von Clausewitz, emphasised manoeuvre as the 'art of positioning forces to achieve strategic objectives while minimising direct confrontation'. In modern military doctrine, manoeuvre warfare prioritises speed, surprise, and the exploitation of enemy vulnerabilities over attritional engagements.

However, the contemporary strategic environment demands a broader conceptualisation of manoeuvre that transcends purely military applications. The rise of hybrid warfare, economic coercion, information operations, and multi-domain competitions has blurred traditional distinctions between peace and war, military and civilian spheres, and kinetic and non-kinetic instruments of warfighting. In this context, manoeuvre must be understood as a fundamental principle of statecraft applicable across all instruments of national power.

Defining the National Capacity of Manoeuvre

The National Capacity of Manoeuvre (NCM) refers to a state's ability to position itself advantageously across multiple domains—Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME)—to advance strategic objectives while constraining adversary options. This capacity encompasses three essential elements:

- **Strategic Flexibility:** The ability to shift approaches, realign partnerships, and adapt strategies in response to changing circumstances without compromising core interests.
- **Operational Agility:** The speed and precision with which a nation can deploy resources, capabilities, and influence across domains.
- **Competitive Positioning:** The creation and exploitation of relative advantages that enhances bargaining power and constrain the adversary freedom of action.

For India, developing manoeuvre capabilities across domains is not merely an operational preference but a strategic necessity. As a rising power operating in a contested regional environment, India faces simultaneous challenges from an assertive China, an unstable Pakistan, volatile neighbourhood dynamics, and an ever-evolving global re-order. The traditional binary choice between alignment and isolation is no longer viable; instead, India must cultivate the ability to manoeuvre deftly across multiple strategic spaces.

The Structural Deficit in India's Contemporary Framework

While the conceptual requirement for multi-domain manoeuvre is clear, India's existing national security and administrative architecture remains fundamentally anchored in traditional single-domain legacy paradigms. The current state machinery is structurally siloed—diplomatic signalling, economic statecraft, military deployments, and information operations are planned and executed within independent vertical hierarchies.

However, the lack of institutional convergence creates a severe structural deficit. In a fast-moving, cross-domain crisis, India's adversaries operate under highly integrated command structures that blend economic blackmail, cyber disruptions, and psychological warfare simultaneously. India's legacy apparatus, conversely, relies on slow, ad-hoc inter-ministerial committees to bridge these domain gaps. Consequently, the nation lacks the institutional mechanisms required to translate distinct vertical capabilities into unified, compounding strategic advantages.

The Relevance of Cross-Domain Manoeuvre for India

India's contemporary strategic context presents both unprecedented opportunities and formidable challenges. On one hand, India's growing economic weight, technological capabilities, and diplomatic stature positions it as a key player in shaping the regional and global order. On the other hand, India confronts a two-front military challenge, economic pressures, diplomatic hurdles, and cognitive warfare threats that exploits its societal vulnerabilities.

Several factors make cross-domain manoeuvre particularly relevant for India's strategic posture:

- **Geopolitical Complexity:** The intensifying US-China rivalry creates pressures for alignment that could constrain India's policy autonomy. Simultaneously, India's deep defence ties with Russia and growing economic integration with Western economies require balancing. Cross-domain manoeuvre provides a framework for handling these competing pressures without surrendering strategic autonomy, though it is currently hampered by the lack of a permanent integrated planning body.
- **Multi-Front Challenges:** India's security environment features simultaneous military, economic, and informational threats. The Line of Actual Control (LAC) remains tense despite tactical de-escalation efforts, while Pakistan continues to sponsor terrorism and conduct information operations. These challenges require integrated responses across multiple domains rather than siloed, reactive approaches.
- **Technological Disruption:** Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, cyber capabilities, and autonomous systems are reshaping the strategic landscape. India's capacity to integrate these technologies into national strategy will determine its position in the global re-order, yet there is currently no structural mechanism to merge corporate technological agility with defence priorities.
- **Economic Interdependence:** India's economic strategy requires a balanced approach to welcoming global capital and technology while protecting key industries. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, diversified trade partnerships, and calibrated engagement with both Western and non-Western economic blocs indicate

this balancing act. Economic manoeuvre—the ability to shift trade flows, investment patterns, and supply chain configurations—requires greater integration with national security— an objective that remains unfulfilled by the current fragmented ministerial architecture.

- **Narrative Competition:** The 2025 India-Pakistan conflict demonstrated that military success alone is insufficient without narrative superiority. Adversaries are increasingly targeting cognitive spaces through disinformation, deepfakes, and hyper-personalized propaganda. India's capacity for cognitive manoeuvre—shaping perceptions and countering false narratives—is a critical strategic capability that currently lacks a dedicated institutional space.

Structure and Approach

This paper examines India's national capacity of manoeuvre through five integrated parts, analysing individual domains while highlighting the critical structural deficiencies that undermine their collective execution. Part I explores Diplomatic Manoeuvre and India's practice of strategic autonomy through multi-alignment. Part II examines Economic Manoeuvre, focusing on geoeconomic hedging and the structural gap in commercial-security fusion. Part III discusses Military Manoeuvre in the context of modernisation and the institutional friction surrounding Integrated Theatre Commands. Part IV investigates Cognitive Manoeuvre as an emerging domain, highlighting the deep structural speed deficits exposed in recent conflicts. The final section lays out comprehensive policy recommendations, introducing mandatory institutional structures for continuity, economic security coordination, and algorithmic decision agility.

Part I: Diplomatic Manoeuvre and Strategic Autonomy

Conceptual Framework

Diplomatic Manoeuvre represents the ability to navigate alignments and partnerships to create diplomatic space for pursuing national interests without permanent entanglements or rigid bloc commitments. For India, diplomatic manoeuvre is operationalised through the doctrine of strategic autonomy—the practice of engaging with nations based on convergent interests while avoiding exclusive blocs that constrain policy independence. Strategic

autonomy is not isolationism; rather, it allows India to extract benefits from multiple relationships simultaneously, maintaining freedom of action based on fluid geopolitical events.

India's Multi-Alignment Strategy

India's diplomatic strategy relies on multi-alignment to balance relations with major powers like the US, China, Russia, and the EU. Instead of binding itself to rigid, single-axis alliances, New Delhi actively engages across diverse multilateral forums including BRICS, the SCO, the Quad, and the G20 to advance its national interests based on specific issue-based convergences (Gesmundo, C. 2026).

However, the deep operational strains of this posture were sharply exposed during the US-Iran war and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which triggered an immediate energy crisis and forced New Delhi into reactive firefighting. Without an automated framework to manage such multi-front challenges, the government had to orchestrate urgent diplomatic interventions, leading to the Prime Minister's rapid diplomatic visits across the Middle East and Europe to secure alternative energy corridors and stabilise trade channels (Jain, S. and Mante, L. 2026). This systemic speed deficit was further highlighted during US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's recent four-day visit, reinforcing that India relies heavily on personalized, high-level political interventions rather than a permanent cross-domain command centre to coordinate diplomacy, economics, and defence in real time (PTI, 2026).

Neighbourhood Diplomacy and Regional Manoeuvre

The limits of India's regional influence are constantly challenged by growing competitive pressures in South Asia, particularly from Beijing's infrastructure funding initiatives and Islamabad's hostile manoeuvres. In response, New Delhi is attempting to foster deeper regional ties. In nations like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, this involves expanding cross-border connectivity and exporting sovereign digital technologies such as unified payment systems.

Similarly, in complex security environments like Afghanistan, the country has adopted a highly practical posture to protect past developmental assets and limit hostile external footprints. When dealing with sudden political shifts or local pushback in countries like the Maldives and Nepal, India increasingly relies on steady economic partnerships and shared cultural links instead of heavy-handed diplomatic pressure.

The Structural Disconnect in Diplomatic Execution

Despite these tactical moves, India's diplomatic manoeuvre is structurally constrained by its isolation from the military and economic statecraft apparatus. Since the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Defence, and Ministry of Commerce operate largely independently, therefore, there is no formalized, permanent structural conduit that allows diplomatic initiatives to instantly leverage military posture or economic power in real time (Khilnani, S. Rajiv Kumar, R. et.al, 2021).

This lack of institutional unity means that while deploying development projects or financial assistance in the neighbourhood, India's administrative machinery faces severe coordination delays that contrasts sharply with the rapid, state-controlled rollouts of foreign competitors. Without an overarching grand-strategic architecture to coordinate diplomatic promises with rapid domestic economic execution and military backing, India's regional manoeuvre space is frequently compressed by nimbler adversaries (MEA, 2026).

Technology Diplomacy and AUKUS Engagement

An emerging dimension of diplomatic manoeuvre involves positioning India within technology partnerships that shape future strategic capabilities. India's support for AUKUS at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) demonstrated a willingness to take stands on technical merit rather than reflexive non-aligned opposition. As AUKUS broadens into Pillar II (artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and undersea capabilities), India has unique opportunities to engage selectively without formal, restrictive memberships. Participation in technology groupings like Chip 4 and various AI governance initiatives reflects a recognition that standard-setting will determine future strategic competitiveness. However, capturing these opportunities requires a unified civil-military technology structure that India currently lacks; as highlighted in national strategy reviews wherein it has been remarked that the historic disconnect between a nation's independent commercial technology ecosystem and its formal defence research pipelines acts as a core systemic barrier to the real-time absorption of emerging dual-use innovations.

Table 1: Strategic Assessment of Diplomatic Manoeuvre

SWOT Element	Analysis of India's Diplomatic Position
Strengths	Proven strategic autonomy; unique ability to bridge the Global South and Western alliances (G20/Quad/BRICS).
Weaknesses	Modest GDP per capita limits massive financial statecraft outlays; profound structural disconnect between MEA, MoD, and economic ministries.
Opportunities	Engaging AUKUS Pillar II and Chip 4 coalitions; expanding Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) diplomacy.
Threats	Hyper-polarization of the US-China rivalry forcing zero-sum choices and squeezing autonomous middle ground; rapid Chinese encirclement via superior infrastructure deployment structures.

Source: Collated by Author

Part II: Economic Manoeuvre and Geoeconomic Statecraft

Economic Manoeuvre as a Strategic Capability

Economic manoeuvre refers to the capacity to shift trade and investment patterns, supply chain configurations, and resource dependencies to achieve strategic objectives while reducing vulnerability to economic coercion. Under the guiding framework of *Aatmanirbhar Bharat*, India seeks to balance economic openness with resilient economic nationalism, ensuring that economic dependencies cannot be weaponized by adversaries.

Trade Diversification and Market Manoeuvre

India's current trade strategy reflects a deliberate diversification to ensure that disruptions or coercion from any single partner do not critically affect the overall economic position.

- **Sector-Specific Hedging:** For energy security, India substantially increased Russian oil imports, dramatically reducing its dependence on Middle Eastern suppliers and demonstrating functional immunity to Western sanctions pressure.
- **Supply Chain Reconfiguration:** The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme offers targeted financial incentives to attract manufacturing in electronics, pharmaceuticals, and automobiles. This repositions India as an alternative node to China in global value chains, increasing its international bargaining power.

Investment Manoeuvre and Capital Source Diversification

By diversifying capital sources—attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) from US tech companies, European manufacturers, Middle Eastern sovereign wealth funds, Japan, and South Korea—India prevents any single capital source from exercising disproportionate leverage. Simultaneously, strict investment screening for sectors with national security implications, particularly concerning Chinese capital in tech and infrastructure, highlights a statecraft that prioritizes security over uncalibrated economic openness. The same appears to be under formalisation in geoeconomic directives and it has been brought out that strategic capital filtering must override short-term liquidity gains to protect critical domestic technology stacks and core digital assets from adversarial equity capture (ET, 2026).

The Absence of Commercial-Security Fusion

The foundational flaw in India's current geoeconomic posture is the complete absence of a structural framework for commercial-security fusion. In Western and Chinese models, private corporate capability and state security goals are systematically linked. In India, the private corporate sector, logistics networks, and technology ecosystems operate in a strategic vacuum, isolated from national security planning, which creates deep operational blind spots when securing critical infrastructure from hostile economic statecraft (Economic Survey, 2025-26).

The country currently lacks a pre-negotiated, structural mechanisms to leverage corporate power as an asymmetric tool of foreign policy, nor does it have institutional protocols to rapidly pivot domestic commercial manufacturing towards strategic defence requirements during an emergency. This structural divide leaves India dependent on slow, ad-hoc interactions between corporate leaders and government bureaucrats during crisis, thus severely limiting national geoeconomic agility and delaying the industrial mobilisation required for long-term strategic resilience (Srivastava, S. 2023).

Table 2: Structural Gaps and Way Forward

Current Structural Gap	Required Strategic Realignment (Commercial-Security Fusion)	Core Operational Vectors
India's private technology, corporate, and logistics sectors currently operate in a strategic vacuum, entirely disconnected from state national security objectives.	Establish a permanent institutional framework that bridges this gap, leveraging private enterprise as a flexible, asymmetric tool of national statecraft.	1. Private Tech Ecosystem Mirroring: Using corporate cloud and cyber networks as real-time backup systems for public infrastructure during a crisis. 2. Agile Supply Chain Pivoting: Pre-engineering commercial production lines to instantly shift to defence or critical component manufacturing when needed. 3. Asymmetric Corporate Infrastructure: Deploying private corporate capital to secure vital global logistics nodes (like ports and digital networks) without direct government baggage.

Source: Collated by Author

Technology, Energy, and Financial Manoeuvre

- Semiconductor Strategy and DPI:** India is investing heavily in semiconductor fabrication partnerships while leveraging its Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) as a global standard, creating powerful network effects that reduce reliance on Western or Chinese digital ecosystems.
- Critical Minerals:** Secure access to lithium, cobalt, and rare earths is being executed through mining investments in Australia, Latin America, and Africa to fuel the renewable energy transition. However, lack of a unified geo-economic command slows down corporate-state syndication for these assets.

- **De-dollarisation and Digital Rupee:** India is cautiously establishing rupee trade mechanisms with partners like Russia and Sri Lanka and accelerating the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) digital rupee pilot to insulate alternative payment channels from external sanctions.

Table 3: Strategic Assessment of Economic Manoeuvre

Identified Structural Vulnerability	Strategic Mitigation Strategy
Total structural separation between private corporate capabilities and state national security planning.	Formalise commercial-security fusion architectures within national grand strategy frameworks.
Persistent dependence on critical raw and advanced technology imports.	Accelerate PLI schemes and secure sovereign technology fabrication via fast-tracked joint ventures.
Bureaucratic friction, regulatory delays, and fragmented ministerial oversight bodies.	Establish a centralised economic Security Council to unify policy clearance pathways.

Source: Collated by Author

Part III: Military Manoeuvre and Multi-Domain Operations

Military Manoeuvre in Modern Warfare

Modern military doctrine continues to evolve manoeuvre from the simple physical movement of forces to Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) wherein land, sea, air, space, cyber, and the electromagnetic spectrum are seamlessly integrated. India's military posture however, must address a highly complex environment characterised by a two-front challenge involving China and Pakistan, contested borders, and emerging asymmetric threats.

Conventional Force Transformation

Air and Maritime Power

The induction of Rafale fighters and the continuous development of the Tejas LCA significantly enhance India's multi-role air superiority, providing the Indian Air Force with deep-strike capabilities and electronic warfare dominance. Concurrently, maritime capabilities have transitioned towards a proactive power-projection posture in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This is anchored by the deployment of the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) *Aridhaman*, which fortifies India's continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent. Supported by

Project 17A stealth frigates and long-range P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, this combined fleet dramatically strengthens maritime domain awareness, allowing India to monitor and secure critical sea lines of communication (SLOCs) against adversarial naval expansions.

Agile Ground Forces

The Indian Army is actively transitioning from legacy mass-heavy infantry models towards technology-enabled, decentralised lethality. A cornerstone of this shift is the creation of over 100,000 certified drone operatives, effectively embedding unmanned aerial systems (UAS) capabilities at the tactical platoon level. Operating at the vanguard of this doctrine are newly established, agile special forces units known as the Bhairav formations (ANI, 2026). These specialized units are engineered specifically to deploy advanced UAS and loitering munitions for deep-manoevre operations. By isolating and neutralising enemy command nodes and forward bases inside hostile territory, they provide a highly asymmetric, low-escalation method to disrupt adversary frontlines. This sweeping restructuring forces a foundational change in leadership philosophy, echoing the directive issued by the Chief of the Army Staff that contemporary operational success "demands a new command culture where leaders 'command technology rather than merely operate it' to ensure decision advantage" (PIB, 2026).

Precision Standoff Strike

To counter sophisticated threat landscapes, India has prioritized the deployment of high-speed, long-range standoff vectors. The development of the BrahMos-X hypersonic missile provides a highly survivable, prompt-strike capability that can bypass modern radar networks due to its extreme speed and unpredictable flight trajectory. Paired with the Akash-NG (Next-Generation) air defence systems, this integration creates a formidable counter-A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area-Denial) capability. Together, these systems allow Indian commanders to systematically degrade enemy defensive bubbles and high-value assets from safe distances, protecting concentrated friendly forces while securing airspace dominance (Pandey, D. 2025).

The Theatre Command Bottleneck and Service Silos

The primary structural barrier to military manoeuvre is the prolonged institutional paralysis surrounding the establishment of Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs). Despite years

of conceptual consensus, India’s warfighting apparatus remains structurally frozen in legacy, service-specific single-domain silos.

The Army, Navy, and Air Force continue to maintain geographically disjointed command structures, separate logistics chains, and isolated operational plans. This structural fragmentation means that jointness is negotiated rather than institutionalized. In a high-intensity conflict against a structurally unified adversary like China’s Western Theatre Command, India’s single-service silos introduce fatal delays in command cycles, preventing real-time cross-domain synchronisation of kinetic and non-kinetic forces.

Joint Doctrines and Cold Start

- **Cold Start Doctrine:** Focused on highly rapid mobilisation (within 48–72 hours) and shallow offensive penetrations via Integrated Battle Groups, this doctrine seeks to exploit operational space and achieve tactical objectives below Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapon escalation threshold. However, its execution is hindered by the lack of permanent joint operational command elements.
- **Cyber-Electromagnetic Operations:** While cross-domain manoeuvre theoretically integrates cyber and electronic warfare directly into kinetic formations, India's current capabilities are structurally sub-optimized, as defensive and offensive cyber tools reside in distinct, non-integrated commands outside the core tactical formations.

Table 4: Strategic Assessment of Military Manoeuvre

Strategic Factor	Operational Reality and Structural Friction Points
Capability Gaps	India trails China in fifth-generation fighters, total naval tonnage, and advanced cyber-warfare architectures.
Structural Inertia	The transition to Integrated Theatre Commands is stalled by institutional resistance from single-service headquarters protective of legacy mandates.
Logistical Fragmentation	Lack of a unified, joint logistics command structure leads to redundant, service-specific supply lines.
Resource Constraints	Defence expenditure as a percentage of GDP limits massive, synchronised cross-domain modernisation programs.

Source: Collated by Author

Part IV: Cognitive Manoeuvre and Information Operations

Cognitive Warfare as a Strategic Domain

Cognitive warfare targets human cognition—perceptions, beliefs, and decision-making processes—to achieve strategic objectives without kinetic engagement. The 2025 India-Pakistan conflict (Operation Sindoor) underscored that battlefield victories can be completely nullified if an adversary achieves dominance in the cognitive space. During Operation Sindoor, India faced a sophisticated campaign featuring deepfakes, AI-driven hyper-personalized disinformation, and the weaponization of existing societal fissures.

Institutional Fragmentation and the Speed Deficit

Operation Sindoor exposed profound, dangerous structural vulnerabilities in India's cognitive defence framework. The nation lacks a centralised, structurally anchored institutional command for the cognitive domain. Instead, cognitive defence responsibilities are scattered across a disjointed array of ad-hoc bodies, including the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MoIB), the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), and individual service intelligence directorates, creating an uncoordinated approach that fails to view information operations as a unified theatre of war (Awasthi, S. 2025).

This structural fragmentation introduces a crippling temporal asymmetry. During a crisis, while adversarial algorithmic networks deploy synthetic media and narrative strikes in milliseconds, the response from India would need to clear a multi-layered maze of bureaucratic ministerial loops for validation and approval, fundamentally paralysing the state's capacity to mount an immediate counter-offensive (Singh, R.K. 2026). This structural speed deficit ensures that India remains permanently on the defensive, reacting to hostile narratives hours or days after they have already altered the strategic baseline—a vulnerability that was systematically exploited during the opening phases of recent border theatre standoffs.

Shifting to Proactive Behavioural Manoeuvre

To overcome these systemic limitations, India must structurally transition from its current posture of 'reactive, defensive fact-checking' to an 'offensive framework of Behavioural Manoeuvre'. This paradigm grounds information operations in organisational behaviour and behavioural psychology, intentionally targeting the decision-making calculus,

institutional biases, and cognitive vulnerabilities of adversary command structures. By mapping the behavioural profiles and core power dynamics within the adversary's decision-making hierarchy, the state can identify specific psychological friction points to induce strategic paralysis before an overt conflict breaks out (Pokorny, L. 2026).

Instead of merely managing domestic public perceptions, a structurally integrated cognitive warfare apparatus would proactively seed strategic ambiguity and informational saturation directly into the adversary's command-and-control layers. This would allow India to actively disrupt the adversary's OODA (Observe-Orient-Decide-Act) loop and dictate the tempo of the cognitive environment, transforming information operations from a secondary support function into a primary vector of strategic deterrence. As External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar emphasized when evaluating the mechanics of a fragmented international system, "in a fragmented world order, strategic ambiguity can be a source of power" (Kumar, S. 2026), necessitating a shift toward proactive perception control.

Resolving Temporal Asymmetry via Pre-Approved Mandates

Bridging the speed deficit cannot be achieved by merely creating new committees, which frequently add more layers of red tape. The change requires a deep fundamental structural reform viz. the institutionalisation of pre-approved operational mandates. Much like the military employs pre-delegated rules of engagement (ROE) in physical combat, operational cognitive defence teams must be legally and structurally authorised to execute immediate, automated countermeasures based on verified trigger thresholds. When an adversarial deepfake or coordinated cyber-cognitive attack is detected, the operational layer must possess the mandated authority to deploy defensive algorithms and counter-narratives within minutes, completely bypassing traditional ministerial clearance loops during active crisis.

Part V: Policy Recommendations for Integrated Cross-Domain Manoeuvre

Conceptual Integration Framework

Effective national manoeuvre requires the total integration of DIME capabilities. India must move past its legacy ad-hoc structures and institutionalise a security-led whole-of-government approach through a formally codified National Security Strategy that explicitly establishes cross-domain manoeuvre as its core organising principle (Niti Aayog, 2024).

National Institutional Continuity and Crisis Leadership

To guarantee that the state machinery can execute cross-domain manoeuvre even under conditions of severe hybrid disruption or asymmetric cyber-siege, India must establish a mandatory National Institutional Continuity Protocol under the NSCS, which must function to provide necessary operational framework, continuity and perspective.

- **Secretary Level National Military Integrator and Advisor (NMIA).** Senior military officer reports directly to the Defence Minister, while integrating all necessary verticals and institutions. He will oversee the integration of the key institutions and departments and ensure that they align with the national security strategy.
- **Hardened Decentralised Command Nodes:** The state must build structurally hardened, geographically decentralized secondary command centres outside the national capital region, linked by military-grade, redundant, quantum-encrypted communication layers to ensure survival under kinetic or cyber assault.
- **Decentralised Execution Mandates:** Crisis leadership doctrines must be re-engineered to legally authorize decentralised execution. If central ministerial coordination centres experience physical or cyber-paralysis, pre-designated secondary regional nodes must instantly inherit the constitutional and operational authority to steer diplomatic, economic, and military assets seamlessly, preventing the collapse of national decision cycles.

Deep Structural Reforms

To rectify the deep structural deficits across all domains, the following institutional structures should be permanently established:

- **National Cognitive Security Agency (NCSA):** A single, unified command structure replacing the current fragmented setup between MeitY, MoIB, and MoD. The NCSA will be headed by the NMIA, and will hold sole operational authority over real-time cognitive defence, capability tracking, and proactive psychological operations, functioning under pre-approved tactical mandates to eliminate bureaucratic delays (GoI, 2024). By bypassing multi-layered ministerial sign-offs, this architecture ensures

that defensive counters and counter-narrative deployments can be launched within minutes of detecting a synchronized adversarial information strike.

- Economic Security Council (ESC):** A permanent statutory body under the cabinet that integrates trade policy, investment screening, resource acquisition, and technology security directly into national grand strategy. The ESC will serve as the primary institutional home for Commercial-Security Fusion, hence creating formal, legal conduits to syndicate private corporate capabilities with national defence priorities. This statutory framework ensures that commercial technology infrastructure and private logistics networks can be seamlessly reoriented to guarantee supply chain continuity during major geopolitical supply disruptions (Gavade, S. 2025). The council will report to the NMIA.
- The Cross-Domain Friction Matrix:** To prevent these new structures from reverting into isolated bureaucratic silos, India must institutionalise a dynamic Cross-Domain Friction Matrix. Administered by the NMIA, this matrix will act as an active, auditable stress-testing framework. Through mandatory, bi-annual inter-ministerial wargaming exercises, the matrix will mathematically measure response latencies, data-sharing bottlenecks, and institutional resistance points between individual departments (e.g. MoD, MEA, MeitY, and Finance). Ministries will be scored on their cross-domain agility, ensuring that structural friction is audited and flattened before a real-world multi-front crisis occurs. This data-driven audit model effectively transforms qualitative institutional inertia into quantifiable metrics, forcing accountability across historically protective bureaucratic boundaries. As NITI Aayog formally highlighted in its structural evaluations, state-backed “programs operate in silos, with minimal inter-ministerial collaboration... leading to a gap between research, innovation and commercialization” (NITI Aayog, 2025).

Table 5: Implementation Roadmap

Timeline Phase	Core Milestone Targets
Near-Term (2026–2027)	* Establish the appointment of National Military Integrator & Advisor (NMIA) and the National Cognitive Security Agency (NCSA) to unify defence. * Codify and authorise Pre-Approved Operational Mandates for cyber teams. * Deploy the baseline Cross-Domain Friction Matrix via simulation audits. * Transition from military single-service commands into ITCs. * Establish a mandatory capital outlay floor of 2.5% of GDP for defence.
Medium-Term (2027–2030)	* Build the Economic Security Council (ESC) to anchor geoeconomic policy. * Codify the Commercial-Security Fusion legal frameworks for private firms. * Fully deploy the National Institutional Continuity Protocol nodes. * Attain scaled, domestic fabrication lines for critical semiconductors.
Long-Term (2030–2035)	* Attain absolute structural synchronization across all DIME vectors. * Field fully automated, proactive behavioural Manoeuvre architectures. * Achieve strategic resilience across energy, technology, and mineral loops.

Source: Collated by Author

Conclusion

India's National Capacity of Manoeuvre represents the deliberate fusion of diplomatic agility, economic flexibility, military effectiveness, and cognitive resilience into a singular, proactive strategic posture. The structural critique is stark: India's current national security architecture is fragmented, slow, and structurally inadequate to handle contemporary, fast-moving cross-domain warfare. Moving beyond historical, siloed approaches is no longer an

optional upgrade; it is the defining variable that will dictate India's survival and success in a highly contested global order.

By replacing ad-hoc committees with permanent institutional bodies like the NCSA and ESC, embracing commercial-security fusion, eliminating bureaucratic latency through pre-approved operational mandates and a focused Military Advisor and Integrator, and auditing systemic institutional resistance via the Cross-Domain Friction Matrix, India can bridge its critical structural deficits. Only through these mandatory structural interventions can India secure its strategic autonomy, successfully deter multi-front aggression, and firmly establish itself as a highly integrated, consequential global actor.

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