

Measures for Improving Management of National Security

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India faces multiple external and internal security threats and challenges, but its response to defeat these successfully has often been inadequate. India's response is usually marked by knee jerk reactions that fail to optimise the capacities of various organs of the state. With the experience gained over the last six decades, there are several steps that the government can take to improve the functioning of higher defence organisations and better manage national security, including planning for the neutralisation of emerging threats and challenges.

The first and foremost item on the government's defence and national security reforms agenda should be the formulation of a comprehensive National Security Strategy (NSS), including that for internal security. The NSS should be formulated after carrying out an inter-departmental, inter-agency, multi-disciplinary strategic defence review. Such a review must take the public into confidence and not be conducted behind closed doors. Like in most other democracies, the NSS should be signed by Prime Minister, who is the head of government, placed on the table of Parliament and released as a public document. Only then will various stakeholders take ownership of the strategy and work unitedly to achieve its aims and objectives.

The armed forces are now in the second year of the 12th Defence Plan (2012-17) and it has not yet been formally approved with full financial backing by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). The government has also not formally approved the long-term integrated perspective plan (LTIPP 2007-22) formulated by HQ Integrated Defence Staff. Without these essential approvals, defence procurement is being undertaken through *ad hoc* annual

procurement plans, rather than being based on duly prioritised long-term plans that are designed to systematically enhance India's combat potential. These are serious lacunae as effective defence planning cannot be undertaken in a policy void. The government must commit itself to supporting long-term defence plans or else defence modernisation will continue to lag and the growing military capabilities gap with China's People's Liberation Army will assume ominous proportions. This can be done only by reviving the dormant National Security Council (NSC) as defence planning is in the domain of the NSC and not the CCS, which deals with current and near-term threats and challenges and reacts to emergent situations.

The inability to speedily conclude major defence contracts to enhance national security preparedness in the face of growing threats and challenges, exemplifies the government's challenges in grappling with systemic flaws in the procurement procedures and processes. Despite having formulated the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) and the Defence Production Policy (DPrP), the government has been unable to reduce bureaucratic red tape and defence modernisation continues to stagnate. It is difficult to understand why the budgetary allocations earmarked on the capital account for the modernisation of the armed forces should continue to be surrendered year after year with complete lack of accountability. The year FY 2010-11 had brought some encouraging news as the Ministry of Defence (MoD) managed to fully utilise all the funds that were allocated on the capital account. This should become the norm rather than the exception.

While internal security challenges are gradually gaining prominence, preparations for conventional conflict must not be neglected. Major defence procurement decisions must be made quickly. The army is still without towed and self-propelled 155 mm howitzers for the plains and the mountains and urgently needs new utility helicopters, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) as also to acquire weapons and equipment for counter-insurgency operations. The navy waited for long for INS Vikramaditya (Admiral Gorshkov) aircraft carrier, which has been refurbished in a Russian shipyard at exorbitant cost and with operationally unacceptable time overruns. Construction of the indigenous air defence ship has also been delayed. The plan of the air force to acquire 126 multi-mission, medium-range combat aircraft in order to maintain its edge over the regional air forces is stuck in the procurement quagmire, even as the indigenous LCA project continues to lag

inordinately behind schedule. All three Services need a large number of light and medium lift helicopters. India's nuclear forces require the Agni-III missile and nuclear-powered submarines with suitable ballistic missiles to acquire genuine deterrent capability. The armed forces do not have a truly integrated C4I2SR system for network-centric warfare, which will allow them to synergise their combat capabilities and defend against cyber-attacks. The approach followed is still a platform-centric one despite the demonstrated advantages of switching to a network-centric approach.

All of these high-priority acquisitions will require extensive budgetary support. With the defence budget languishing at less than 2.0 per cent of India's GDP compared with China's 3.5 per cent and Pakistan's 4.5 per cent plus US military aid – it will not be possible for the armed forces to undertake any meaningful modernisation. The funds available on the capital account at present are inadequate to suffice even for the replacement of obsolete weapons systems and obsolescent equipment that are still in service well beyond their useful life cycles. The central police and para-military forces (CPMFs) also need to be modernised and better trained as they are facing increasingly greater threats while continuing to be equipped with sub-standard weapons.

The government must immediately appoint a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or a permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee to provide single-point advice to the CCS on military matters and to synergise operational plans as well as capital acquisitions. Any further dithering on this key structural reform in higher defence management on the grounds of the lack of political consensus and the inability of the armed forces to agree on the issue will be extremely detrimental to India's interests in the light of the dangerous developments taking place in India's neighbourhood. The logical next step would be to constitute tri-Service integrated theatre commands to synergise the capabilities of individual Services. International experience shows that such reform has to be imposed from the top down and can never work if the government keeps waiting for it to come about from the bottom up.

Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or of the Government of India.