

NATIONAL SECURITY

Right noises but funds constraint

Procurement process has been a focus, reforms include Defence Planning Committee



In the final days of the Obama administration, US granted India Major Defence Partner status. File

SUSHANT SINGH
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THERE ARE three major events in the national security domain over the last four years that are prominent in public memory: the commando raids on an NSCN-K camp in Myanmar in 2015, surgical strikes on terror launch pads across the Line of Control in 2016, and the face-off with Chinese soldiers at Doklam. Each one of them was hailed as a success and marketed politically by the government, even though the real outcomes from these were not known to the public.

These events exemplify the track record of this government on the national security front over the past four years, which has seen a lot of hype but little tangible achievement. The defence budget as a percentage of GDP fell to 1.47, lower than the levels seen in 1962. Moreover, the Defence Ministry has seen four ministers, whereas the other ministries which form part of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) — foreign, finance and home — have seen no change in their ministers since May 2014. With a steep learning curve for every new minister, this has delayed and hampered the pace of reform of the national security sphere.

The biggest structural reform was announced by the

ministry last month, with the formation of the Defence Planning Committee (DPC) under the chairmanship of the National Security Adviser (NSA), Ajit Doval. Four verticals — policy and strategy, planning and capability development, defence diplomacy and defence manufacturing — have been included in the charter of the DPC, which includes the defence, foreign and expenditure secretaries besides the three service chiefs. It is an attempt to fix the dysfunctional procurement process and align future defence acquisitions with the funds that can be spared over the next few years, in consonance with a national security strategy.

The procurement process has been the focus of much public attention, with the idea of a strategic partnership model to promote private defence manufacturing being hailed by all commentators. Manohar Parrikar nearly finalised the model as part of a new Defence Procurement Procedure before he quit as defence minister to go back to Goa as Chief Minister, but that has failed to take off. Same has been the fate of Make in India in defence sector and relaxation of FDI in domestic defence manufacturing.

While there has been criticism for lack of adequate budgetary support, the defence forces have still delivered



NIRMALA SITHARAMAN, DEFENCE MINISTER

In the last eight months, the DAC has approved procurement of equipment valued at Rs 43,844 crore including Rs 32,253 crore procurement of Made-in-India equipment to strengthen the operational preparedness of the Armed Forces..

The country had notched up remarkable achievements with the introduction of one rank one pension for defence personnel, modernisation of defence forces and also carried out a surgical strike against Pakistan in 2016



THE OPPOSITION VIEW



Modi government has endangered defence preparedness and undermined the morale of our armed forces in the last four years. Procurement of defence equipment has come to a grinding halt, conspiratorial silence over Rafale aircraft pricing is intriguing, control and command structures are in complete disarray and non-implementation of OROP has demoralised the forces

RANDEEP SURJEWALA, CONGRESS SPOKESPERSON

whenever they have been asked to do so. The Navy has adopted a more strategic role with its new deployment pattern, while the Indian Air Force conducted its biggest exercise and took part in major humanitarian and disaster relief operations. The Army successfully conducted cross-border raids in Myanmar, besides launching

surgical strikes across the LoC and warding off the Chinese threat in Doklam.

WHAT'S DONE

THE FORMATION of the Defence Planning Committee is the biggest reform of higher national security structure in decades. It brings a political appointee, the NSA, over the three

military chiefs and aligns their demands with the economic realities, diplomatic goals and defence ministry's requirements. This is likely to end the criticism that the defence services are being starved of funds to meet modernisation requirements.

The award of One Rank One Pension (OROP) has taken care of a long-pending demand of retired military personnel, which was promised by Narendra Modi as a prime ministerial candidate.

The deal to buy 36 Rafale fighter jets from France under a government-to-government agreement after cancelling the old tender for 126 fighters gives the IAF a modern aircraft, which will also somewhat bridge the shortfall in the number of fighter squadrons. The government also decided to induct HAL-manufactured indigenous LCA Tejas in the IAF, by raising a squadron in Bengaluru. A further order for Mark 1A version of LCA Tejas has also been placed by the IAF with HAL.

The Navy is finally on its way to making up its shortfall in the number of submarines with the induction of Kalvari class of submarines, which have been built in India under Project 75. Although delayed, these six submarines will add teeth to India's maritime presence in the region, as it faces a growing challenge from the Chinese Navy.

The Defence Procurement Procedure has been amended and reissued, followed by a new policy on Strategic Partnership to promote Make in India in defence manufacturing. While it has not achieved desired results, it forms the basis for the roadmap of the future.

India signed a military logistics sharing agreement, LEMOA, with the US, which had been pending for more than a decade. The agreement was operationalised and South Block followed it up with another logistics agreement with France. In the final days of the Obama administration, US also granted India the Major Defence Partner

status, though its advantages are yet to accrue to Delhi.

The surgical strikes finally showed India a way in which it could respond to terror strikes from Pakistan without climbing the escalation ladder with a nuclear-armed neighbour. This followed a cross-border raid on a militant camp inside Myanmar following a deadly ambush on Assam Rifles in Manipur. The face-off with Chinese soldiers at Doklam inside Bhutan was also resolved after 73 days, without a shot being fired, and the two countries eventually went for a reset of their relations. India also kept up pressure on Pakistan on the LoC by taking a proactive stance and targeting Pakistan Army posts that were facilitating infiltration of militants into Kashmir.

WHAT'S STUCK

THE APPOINTMENT of a single-point military advisor to the government, whether a Chief of Defence Staff or a Permanent Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee, continues to hang fire. Similar is the state of integrated theatre commands, which have seen little progress despite a lot of discussion and debate about higher defence reforms.

The poor state of modernisation of the three defence services continues to afflict India's national security preparedness. This is hampered not only by bureaucratic procedure but also by lack of adequate funds from the government. Such has been the gravity of the crisis that the army vice-chief had to go public with the parliamentary standing committee on defence about the gross shortage of funds for running the army, leave alone buying new weapon systems.

The state of civil-military relations has seen new tensions over multiple issues in the past four years, whether it be OROP protests, opening of roads in cantonments, pay commission recommendations, status equivalence of military officers, or statements by senior military officers on politically sensitive topics.