

CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

ENHANCING INDIAN MILITARY POWER

BY

MAJ GENERAL HARSHA KAKAR (RETD)

Pakistan's incursion post the Balakote strike led to the shooting down of a Pak F16 by a MIG 21 Bison. The air chief was questioned by reporters as to why the air force launched a MIG 21 against an F 16, knowing the difference in capabilities between the two. The air chief's answer was realistic, 'It is there in the inventory and it would be used'. He has also been repeatedly been questioned on the aging Indian air force fleet and increased crashes leading to loss of pilots. Considering his appointment, he cannot blame successive governments for delays in procurement and non-availability of funds, a fact well known.

With the launch of the surgical strike in 2016 and the air strike recently, it is evident that when Pak comes under pressure it acts temporarily and reduces terrorism in the valley. With passage of time, they regain composure and another strike is launched. Demands for listing Masood Azar as a global terrorist would only satisfy Indian egos. Within Pak, he would soon be free and running his anti-India campaign as earlier.

Despite all international efforts and pressures, militancy in the valley would remain as it is being maintained, just below the level of threshold of Indian tolerance. With Afghanistan heading towards peace, there could be an influx of battle-hardened militants into Kashmir. Simultaneously, the LoC would be active as Pak would continue seeking to push in militants. Firing on the LoC has neither died down nor would it in the foreseeable future. There would be ups and downs, with more ups, rather than downs.

Talks with Pak would not be on any agenda for a long time as its army would neither desire it nor support it. Kartarpur suits Pak, as also meets the long-time desire of the Sikh community, hence cooperation there would not imply reduction of tensions. Simplistically put, enmity with Pak, which considers only India as an enemy, would remain. Thus, India's western borders continue to be a threat.

Doklam was an indicator of the troubled environment surrounding India. Despite the bonhomie between Modi and Xi Jinping at Wuhan, there is no guarantee that China will not escalate in an area of their choosing. They have always resorted to localised offensive actions to prove that the border remains disputed. There is a perception that Xi promised Modi that China would not undertake the military route to resolving the border dispute. However, that is no guarantee.

India is expanding its footprints in the Indian Ocean. Increased presence of the Chinese navy into our region, their construction of ports around India, all add to our security concerns. While India is enhancing its capabilities in the Andamans, the navy is woefully short of desired capabilities.

In this increasing complex era of challenges, Indian financial planners have begun reducing the defence budget. Defence capabilities take decades to mature and need constant upgrade to keep it at an acceptable level. The only way India can meet its challenges is to evolve a mechanism which ensures a steady flow of funds for management of national security. The utilization of these funds can best be done if there is an upgrade in the apex management of defence.

As recent incidents against Pak have indicated, there are increased shortfalls in every force. The air force has been piled with aircraft which should have been discarded years ago. The army had to move in Bofors Guns from other sectors to retaliate to Pak firing and compel it to come to terms. Modernisation of the artillery is on the way.

The navy is desperately short of minesweepers amongst other vessels. In this environment each service would be projecting its own needs as it considers its importance to ensuring national security.

The concept of theatre commands has presently been bunked by the government due to objections by the air force while fear of a coup blocks the all-encompassing appointment of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). The HQ Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) which was meant to function under the CDS remains headless and toothless. It exists, solely in name, ignored by the services, employed by the NSA as a secretariat for the Defence Planning Committee.

Understanding the reasons why the government would not make crucial changes at the apex level of management of defence, service chiefs proposed an alternative. The alternative was to appoint a Permanent Chairman of the Chief's of Staff Committee (PCCOSC). This appointment would be the first amongst equals, not command the three services but would handle all issues concerning joint requirements of the armed forces. He would also be the single point advisor to the government.

The suggestion was officially announced by the Naval Chief when he addressed his annual press conference prior to Navy Day. It has neither been agreed to nor has it been debated by the MoD in public domain. Thus, indicators are that it has yet to be studied.

It is rare within any armed forces that service chiefs are willing to accept an appointment which could override their direct contact with political leaders and impact their projections for capability enhancement. The present set of service chiefs have taken this step, aware of the impact the lack of such an appointment has on management of defence at the strategic level and in dealing with different branches of the government.

Simultaneously, those within the government need to reassess their allocation of funds for national security. Development of a nation is only possible in a secure environment and economic development provides funds for security. Our financial planners should pay heed to the words of Benjamin Netanyahu, 'The weak crumble, are slaughtered and are erased from history while the strong, for good or for ill, survive. The strong are respected, and alliances are made with the strong, and in the end, peace is made with the strong.'

India's security challenges are only going to multiply, rather than recede in the years ahead. A secure nation respected by its neighbours is only possible if the country has a sound economy and a formidable military. A formidable military is only possible if there is a reorganization of the apex management of defence. Ignoring either is perilous. It is hoped that both aspects are favourably considered by the new government.

Disclaimer:- Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.