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A former national security advisor explains how India can modernise its military tech

By Arvind Gupta

The context of war is changing for India too. On its western border, Pakistan, though numerically inferior to India, is trying its best to modernize its armed forces. It has been generously helped by China in the development of missiles and nuclear arsenal. The gap between the Indian and Pakistani militaries, though significant, is narrowing in some areas. Pakistan has also sought to cultivate Russia, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic for sourcing high-tech equipment. Over the years, it has tried to establish an indigenous military technical complex with Chinese technical assistance.

However, it is China that has made big strides in manufacturing a wide variety of weapons platforms ranging from ships to aircraft and anti-ship missiles, anti-satellite weapons, and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). It has set up extensive defence R&D and defence production systems. China's defence expenditure in absolute terms is now second only to that of the US. It is also emerging as a leading exporter of arms. China-Pakistan collaboration in the defence sphere is a major challenge to Indian security.

To meet these challenges, the Indian military forces are being modernised. They have over the years acquired state-of-the-art platforms and other equipment and gradually prepared themselves for network-centric warfare. However, it must be mentioned that India continues to import advanced defence technologies from other countries. The acquisitions in recent years of aircraft carrier Vikramaditya and S-400 missile defence systems from Russia, C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft and C-130 medium lift transport aircraft from the US are some examples. The armed forces have a long list of items which they intend to import in the medium to long term. The acquisition of high-tech platforms, equipment, and even ammunition illustrates the point that India has still a long way to go before it becomes self-reliant in some critical defence technologies.

India's indigenisation effort is based largely on the DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) and the DPSUs (Defence Public Sector Undertakings). The DRDO develops prototypes and the DPSUs manufacture them. For strategic missiles, the DRDO does all the work from development to productionisation. Over the years, the DPSUs and the DRDO have sought to fulfill the demands of the armed forces to some extent and their achievements are creditable. But overall, the indigenisation effort is yet to take off.

The private sector is still not in a position to meet the needs of the armed forces largely because it has been deliberately kept out of defence production. The micro small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector is yet to grow.

It is dependent on the growth of larger players. The procedures are cumbersome and stacked against the private sector. This is now changing, but there is a lot of catching up to do. The Make in India programme is taking off but "Made in India" is still some way off. The problem, however, is that many of the DRDO's projects have been delayed. The armed forces have also raised the issue of quality. Their needs are urgent, hence they often take recourse to imports rather than wait for DRDO projects to fructify. Yet, it must be said that the DRDO over the years has done a commendable job and as an R&D organisation contributed to the development of indigenous capacities in critical technologies.

The DRDO's problems are wide-ranging, from inadequate manpower in critical areas to the lack of proper synergy with the armed forces. The armed forces are unable or unwilling to wait for DRDO products and systems to mature; this is the nature of innovation. For it to compete with global defence R&D organisations, the DRDO has to have much larger, better-trained and highly motivated manpower, larger budgets, and more freedom in its operations.

It has to be allowed to bear the risks inherent in innovation. In the risk-averse atmosphere prevailing in the country, the DRDO cannot be an exception. However, not all the blame can be put on the DRDO for delays as the above prerequisites are not available to it. At the same time, it cannot be fully absolved from responsibility. The problem of delays should also be looked at from the DRDO's perspective. It is a part of the innovation ecosystem that is not geared to deliver products on time. The armed forces are its only customers. They project their plans of acquisitions and technology through a document known as the LTIPP which lays down the needs of the armed forces for a fifteen-year period. For instance, the current LTIPP of the MoD is from 2012 to 2027.

From the LTIPP is derived a document known as the Technology Perspective and Capability Roadmap. Ideally, this document should give the DRDO and the industry a lead time of fifteen years to plan for innovation and production. But in practice it is too generic in nature and does not give any practical information on the basis of which the DRDO can plan. For instance, the document says that the armed forces will require space-based sensors but does not provide either the numbers that would be needed or their parameters. In the absence of such details the DRDO is unable to start its work. The actual details are usually made available only when the armed forces begin to acquire a product. By that time it is too late to design it indigenously.

<https://qz.com/india/1360460/india-must-look-beyond-drdo-for-defence-modernisation/>



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Indian and Singapore navies to commemorate 25th anniversary of maritime bilateral exercise

Singapore: The Indian and Singapore navies will conduct joint exercises next month to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the maritime bilateral exercise between the two countries. "Our excellent Defense relationship is a reflection of deep mutual trust and a shared vision for the region," Indian High Commissioner Jawed Ashraf said here last night.

"This year, in just a few weeks from now, we will be celebrating 25 years of our bilateral naval exercise, the longest uninterrupted naval exercises that India has with any country in the world," he said. Later in the year, the two countries' air forces and armies will also conduct joint exercises, he added. Singapore is a leading source of investment in India and a key financial market for Indian companies. The country is the gateway to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and a broader East.

The economic partnership is of a great value to both the countries, Ashraf said at the India's 72nd Independence Day celebration reception held here. Elaborating, he said Singapore is a leading destination for outbound Indian investments, which accounts for about 20 per cent

Approximately 8,000 Indian companies are registered in Singapore, Ashraf said. He pointed out that the two nations are working together in the fields of technology and innovation solutions that inspire hope and provide solutions for the weak and vulnerable. "The Indian professionals and the startups here provide the spark that is igniting the eco system and creating the Cyber Bridge between our two countries," he said. Singapore's education minister On Ye Kung was the Guest of Honor at the Independence Day celebration.

China Defense minister to discuss possibility of setting up hotline with India

Chinese minister of national Defense and a member of the Central Military Commission Wei Fenghe is set to visit India from August 21 to 24, during which both sides are expected to discuss measures to deepen the strategic communication between the forces, including the possibility of setting up a hotline between their top military commanders, officials familiar with the development said. "This is the highest level Chinese functionary we are hosting after the Wuhan summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in April.

This meeting will focus on what the leaders had underlined: the need for maintaining strategic communication between the militaries," said an official. The Chinese minister will have detailed discussions with his Indian counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman and other officials. The proposal for setting up a hotline would also come up for further discussion and an official, requesting anonymity, said they are looking for resolving the matter by 'narrowing down the technical differences'.

The technical difference is whether the hotline would be between the two Director Generals of Military Operations of two countries or between the commanders who are in charge of the border areas on either side. "Neither the PLA nor Indian army have any objection to the hotline," said an official. "After Wuhan there were military delegations from both sides visiting each other.

There are improved contacts," an official said. Former Northern Army commander Lt General BS Jaiswal (retd) said that India and China always have cordial strategic exchanges at the higher echelons, but friction at the ground has still not been controlled. "The differences regarding the boundary question need to be ironed out because these small issues tend to be up from the tactical spectrum to strategic strains," Jaiswal added.