

Not made in India

The public is often bemused on hearing senior military leaders make gratuitous public pronouncements regarding India's readiness to "fight a two-front war". Bewilderment, however, turns into trepidation on reading media reports that the army is looking for eight lakh rifles, carbines and machine-guns, in the international market, to equip its 13-lakh jawans! Our uninhibited Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) leaves little to the imagination, as he tables annual reports in Parliament, exposing India's deficiencies in military wherewithal.

Further proof of our "readiness" comes from the previous Raksha Mantri, who revealed to the media that days before the Indian Army's cross-border raids into Pakistan, he had to send officers abroad, "...with authority to carry out on-the-spot purchases." If a relatively minor army operation (hyperbolically described as "surgical strikes"), involving a few dozen soldiers, required urgent "on-the-spot purchases" from abroad, how would India manage to sustain half a million troops deployed in an intense and protracted conflict on two separate fronts? While this conundrum does not seem to trouble our decision-makers, the tax-payer needs to reflect on some facts about our two potential adversaries, China and Pakistan.

Pakistan has the world's seventh largest army, and even though permeated by religious fundamentalism and embroiled in politics, its professional capabilities cannot be ignored. Those who sneer at the Pakistani "deep state" overlook its strategic master-stroke, whereby, as a military-client of "all-weather friend", China, it has ensured steady arms transfers to all wings of the Pakistani military. Having created a high level of equipment commonality with the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Pakistan can go to war, confident that its attrition losses will be expeditiously replaced from PLA stocks.

By comparison, India's acute dependence on imported arms and ammunition, 60 per cent-70 per cent of Russian origin, will constitute a grave handicap and vulnerability in a conflict. Over the years, not only have Indo-Russian relations become purely transactional, but the (post-Soviet) Russian arms industry has been found incapable of providing timely support for its products; a fact repeatedly pointed out in the CAG reports. Other foreign suppliers may prove equally unreliable in wartime.

Coming to India's main adversary, the Chinese PLA constitutes the world's largest military organisation, with formidable capabilities in the conventional, nuclear, cyber, maritime and space domains. Of greater significance is the fact that China is self-sufficient in major weapon systems, and has surpassed Britain, France and Germany as an exporter of arms, 70 per cent of which are supplied to neighbouring Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Ironically, in 1949, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) came into being, India was industrially well ahead, because the demands of WW II had led to the establishment of arms, ordnance and aircraft production facilities to support the Allied war effort world-wide. So, how did China overtake us?

In the early 1950s, a fraternal Soviet Union commenced a massive transfer of arms to the PLA, under a Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship. However, as ideological fissures emerged and the Soviets threatened to stop aid, the Chinese leadership ordered seizure of hardware as well as drawings and technological data relating to Soviet weapons. Once the split actually occurred, in the mid-1960s, the Chinese leadership took a far-sighted decision to launch a project for attaining self-reliance in arms, through reverse engineering ("guochanhua" in Mandarin), as a national endeavour.

The first phase of "guochanhua" helped China establish, by the mid 1980s, serial production of Soviet-origin tanks, artillery, submarines, jet fighters and bombers, as well as strategic systems

like ballistic missiles and nuclear submarines. Manufactured without Soviet licences, many of these products had serious flaws and contained imported Western components. But they were “Made in China” and constituted a “great leap forward” towards self-reliance.

China has, subsequently, launched repeated cycles of “guochanhua”, with the aim of acquiring the latest military and dual-use technologies; legitimately, if possible, but through industrial espionage and violation of intellectual property rights, when required. At the turn of this century, China had reached a level of technological development surpassing Russia’s. Today, China has stunned the world by its ingenuity, exemplified by the world’s fastest super-computer (the Sunway Taihu-light), J-31 fifth generation stealth-fighter, an electro-magnetic aircraft catapult to equip its new aircraft-carrier and huge strides in robotics, artificial-intelligence and drones.

India, by a quirk of circumstance, has become a military and economic entity with great-power aspirations, before it has become a significant industrial power. Consequently, it is in the anomalous situation of being a nuclear-weapons state with the world’s fourth-largest armed forces, but having to support their operational needs through massive arms imports. All this, inspite of a vast military-industrial complex, with a large pool of DRDO scientists and a network of sophisticated laboratories, backed by advanced production facilities of the defence PSUs.

The Bangladesh War was won only because General Manekshaw sought a grace of nine months to equip his troops. The brief Kargil War required desperate replenishment of ammunition, midway through the operation. India’s continuing dependence on foreign arms, coupled with a dysfunctional acquisition process has eroded the combat readiness of our armed forces. Foreign arms purchases, considered a “golden-geese” for political war-chests, have also engendered a morally-corrosive system of corruption at many levels.

Our myopic failure to learn from experience, and to acknowledge the deleterious impact of this void on India’s national security, may cost us dearly vis-a-vis future machinations of the China-Pak axis. It is a pity that not one of our post-independence political leaders showed the foresight to launch a strategic initiative that could make India self-reliant in weapon-systems. Today, we do have the dream of “Make in India”, but it awaits fulfilment by a languid bureaucracy and a complex document, the “Defence Procurement Procedure”, which, after six iterations, has failed to deliver anything substantive to the military.

What we need is a 50-year vision for self-reliance in weaponry and a clear-cut strategy, for its implementation by an empowered “czar”. To those who ask, “Isn’t it too late?” one can only say, “If we never make a start, how will we ever get there?”

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com