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Volume 2 Issue 1, January-March 2019

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DEFENCE STRATEGY IN NDA GOVERNMENT: AN OVERVIEW



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Abstract: Narendra Modi became the PM in 2014. Modi's legislative agenda has been dominated by the news of defence acquisitions, participation in war games, defence budgets, etc. The present paper focused on the different strategies led by the NDA Government.

Key Words: Defence Reaction with world countries, Defence Budget, Strategies

Introduction

After Independence, India did not pay much heed to the military. Pandit Nehru thought that defence expenditure is unnecessary and is imperialist. Whereas India's neighbor China gave a lot of attention to this aspect. Some think that he was also scared of giving too much power to the military after he saw the coups happening in Pakistan. Narendra Modi is different in this manner. He believes in the power of the military. He is absolutely right in believing that as long as a country has a strong military, diplomacy will never fail.

Nirmala Sitharaman, in her address to the Lok Sabha recently, presented some facts about our defence preparedness and that of our neighbors. China, during 2004-15, added 400 new aircraft, including 5th generation stealth aircraft. Pakistan also increased their capacity by adding some F-16s and 43 JF-17 aircraft. While everyone around us was increasing their military capacity, India's squadron's strength went down from 42 in 2002 to 33 in 2015. Here is a brief overview of how NaMo has fared in the defence aspect of his tenure.

Dealings with the United States

India's fleet of MiG 21 is aging and is in need of replacement. In 2017, the GOI went on a buying spree looking for new aircraft in the international markets for the Air Force. It had to choose from Lockheed Martin's F-16 Fighter Falcon and Saab's JAS 39 Gripen. India opted for the F-16 jets. F-16 jets are used by many countries, so its reputation is quite known. It has APG-83 Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar, a modernized cockpit, advanced weapons, conformal fuel tanks, automatic ground collision avoidance system, advanced engine, and industry-leading extended structural service life of 12,000 hours.

It can locate targets in all weather conditions and detect low flying aircraft in radar ground clutter. An all-weather capability allows it to accurately deliver ordnance during non-visual bombing conditions.

The wings of the airplane will be manufactured by Tata Advanced System Limited due to Na Mo's flagship project "Make in India" in a facility in Hyderabad. The planes will start being delivered by 2021 or at the latest by 2022. This is just the starting of a defence partnership between the US and India. It is a win-win situation as US companies will profit with gaining access to the huge Indian market and India needs them to increase their capacity.

India will acquire the Block 70 version of the fighter jet which is more advanced than what Pakistan possesses.

Involving Israel

Israel has been a supplier to the Indian defence industry for quite some time now. Israel is an expert at making drones, UAVs, radar systems and India has requirements for all of them. Under Narendra Modi's leadership, friendship with Israel has touched new heights. India's defence relationship with Israel was given a boost after the US strong-armed Israel into stop exporting defence equipment to China.

India purchased three AWACS from Israel for the Air Force. Airborne Warning and Control Systems is a mobile, long-range radar system which is very efficient in detecting low-flying aircraft at a distance of 370 km and also high-level targets. AWACS can detect and track incoming fighters, cruise missiles, and drones much before ground-based radars. Due to its high speed, the communication system of AWACS cannot be jammed or intercepted. Although Pakistan and China have more of this than India, it is a start in the right direction.

India also purchased a Long Range Surface to Air Missile (LR-SAM) from Israel. Israel has agreed to supply the Barak 8 Missile for seven ships of Indian Navy. This is jointly being developed by Israel and India. Designed to defend against a variety of short-to-long-range airborne threats including fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, drones and projectiles, Barak-8 incorporates a state-of-the-art phased array multi-mission

radar, two-way data link, and a flexible command and control system, enabling users to simultaneously engage multiple targets day and night and in all weather conditions.

India has also decided to buy a Medium Range Surface to Air Missile (MR-SAM) for the Army. In this deal, there will be around 40 firing units and 200 missiles for the army. The MR-SAM, a land-based version of the (LR-SAM) of the navy, will have a strike range of up to 70 km.

There is still one missed opportunity by India, this is the purchase of 8,000 spike missiles, 300 launchers and transfer of technology from Israel to Bharat Dynamics Limited. India and Israel first confirmed the deal, then PM Narendra Modi backed out stating the reason that this purchase will not be good for the indigenous manufacturing companies. DRDO is said to be making its own version of the spike missiles, but they always miss their deadlines and the missiles always have some flaws in them.

Relationship with Russia

As mentioned earlier in the article, Mr. Nehru did not focus much on the armed forces, this changed after China defeated India in the 1962 war. India decided to strengthen its armed forces significantly after that. Russia had a big role in ensuring this. Russia has since been a vital defence partner for India helping India in its time of need. Now, India purchases more defence material from Russian defence industry than Russia purchases for itself.

Russia is the largest source for India to maintain its defence might. In October last year, PM Modi and President Putin signed \$7 Billion worth of deals. This includes completing the final phase of the S-400 Triumf Air Defence Shields. India has decided to purchase 5 regiments of this. The system can engage all types of aerial targets including aircraft, UAVs, and ballistic and cruise missiles within the range of 400km, at an altitude of up to 30km. The system can simultaneously engage 36 targets.

S-400 has 4 new types of missiles in addition to the missiles of the previous model of S-300. The range of these missiles is from 120 kilometers to 400 kilometers. They can hit high-speed target such as fighter jets with a high hit probability. The radar can detect and track aircraft, rotorcraft, cruise missiles, guided missiles, drones and ballistic rockets within the distance of 600km. It can simultaneously track up to 300 targets. The command and control center of the S-400 system recognizes the threats and also prioritizes them. The systems would be delivered by 2020.

India will also purchase 4 frigates from Russia for the Navy. These frigates will improve India's capability to detect and track submarines and enemy missiles. They will also help in carrying cruise missiles. 2 of these will be built in a Goa shipyard and two will be directly imported from Russia. The two that will be built here will involve the transfer of technology which will lead to higher prices for these two frigates. Frigates have been a long-standing demand of the Indian Navy.

But there are some outside forces that do not want this relationship to prosper. America has been using CAATSA against India and other countries. Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act, in the Indian context, prohibits any Indian entity to indulge itself in any "transactions" with the Russian defence sector. If any Indian entity did so, it will invite US sanctions on that entity. In the Indian case, that entity can be the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) headed by the Minister of Defence or the Defence Procurement Board (DPB) headed by Defence Secretary. Although India has received a waiver as of now from the CAATSA, Russia and India are looking at alternatives to keep their partnership going without the fear of US sanctions. This could include setting up a dedicated bank for military purchases between the two nations and the possibility of transferring money in troubles to Russia instead of dollars.

Rafale Aircraft

This section will not try to answer the question of whether the deal was a scam or not. According to the above-mentioned stats by Nirmala Sitharaman, India's defence preparedness was not at all up to the mark. Any confrontation with China or Pakistan might not have gone India's way.

The former Defense Minister A.K. Antony had 10 years to make that deal, but for reasons only known to him, he never acted on it. There were fundamental differences between France's Dassault and India's HAL. They had disagreements over two issues, these were: (i) number of man hours it will take to produce the 108 aircraft from scratch, and (ii) the responsibility matrix, i.e. the responsibilities of both the companies which were not acceptable to both the sides. These issues were never solved and the deal was never signed.

It was Modi's government that signed the deal with slight changes. They decided to buy 36 aircraft instead of 126. But all of their 36 aircraft were in flyaway condition, whereas in the UPA deal, 18 were in flyaway condition, and 108 were bare to the bones. The deal that the Modi government struck will start to bear its fruits from this year only. The first delivery will be made in the middle of the year.

Modi's deal involved 13 ISEs (Indian Specific Enhancement) to the Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA). These 13 ISEs are confidential so that the other countries do not know what our aircraft possesses. Because of these 13 ISEs, India now is the owner of the most advanced Rafale aircraft. The Air Force needed these aircraft very badly, and now they will have it, this is a plus point for the NaMo administration. They state that 36 aircraft were bought because the Air Force had an urgent demand for them; one aspect where Modi could have improved was that he could have bought 36 now and kept 90 for later.

The decision to involve Reliance on production is not all a bad one. HAL is not the organization it once was. Many personnel in the armed forces also agree that HAL would not have been able to manufacture it. There have been instances when

bulletproof jackets made by HAL had to be rejected by the army, imagine the kind of problems they would have had if they tried to make the aircraft as advanced as Rafale.

Defence Budgets

This is one more aspect where NaMo government could have done better. Defence budgets are a very strong indicator of the defence condition of the country and in India; the defence budget does not present a positive image. Although the absolute amount of the budget allocation for defence purposes has been increasing, the defence budget as a percentage of GDP has been declining consecutively for years. This year Rs. 300,000 crore was allocated in the defence budget, the highest ever, but as a percentage of GDP, this is not much. Such kind of paltry spending is not enough to sustain the defence capability when we have a stronger than ever China and Pakistan.

Given the recent changes in Afghanistan, after the US withdrawal of troops, Pakistan will not need to spend so much of its energy in Afghanistan as the Taliban will already have a good presence there, they can focus on their strategy of making India bleed by a thousand cuts by focusing on their incomplete mission of an India free of Kashmir. The US will probably get an assurance from the Taliban that Afghan soil will not be used for anti-US activities. Pakistan is the reason that the US will get such assurance, the grateful US will give some of its immovable defence material to Pakistan and might resume their sales of defence equipment to Pakistan. This can be used against India.

In addition to the material help that will begin to pour into Kashmir Mujahideen, a victory over the US (as the American withdrawal will be interpreted) will boost the morale of terrorists in the valley and beyond. Pakistan will again facilitate the induction of battle-hardened Taliban into Kashmir as was the case in the 1990s.

Even countries which have no threats to their territorial integrity prefer keeping their defence budgets at the rate of 2% of GDP. India right now is below this level. India apart from threats from outside also faces militancy in Kashmir and also faces Left Wing Extremism (LWE), the army is also needed to keep this under control.

The next administration will have to focus on this. The best I can do is hope that the electorate does not throw a hung house, only a strong decisive government can deal with this.

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