

## STRATEGY OF ARMS PROCUREMENT

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India, today, is facing a serious challenge in trying to cope with a rising China. As the nation strives to meet the challenge, it finds itself at a serious disadvantage. Over many years the Chinese have succeeded in making long-term investments and created an infrastructure which India has failed to develop. With intensive effort and a single-minded determination they have managed to reach the second highest GDP in the world and now possess a much larger and more modernized military than India's..

Under these circumstances, we have no option but to look for factors in our favour which could be exploited to countervail China's military power and circumstances that could be leveraged to our advantage. The Chinese, for instance, can procure their defence equipment from only one country - Russia, while the whole world's arms markets are open to India. It is a definite 'advantage', to be exploited, provided the country is able to formulate an effective strategy to capitalize on it. It can't be done if the acquisition of each individual equipment is considered an end in itself and then put out to tender for purchase on the basis of lowest quote. That surely, isn't the most optimal way for a major power to modernise its armed forces.

The question of military modernisation, has no easy answers as it is also inescapably related to the notion of establishing strategic relationships. If an equipment is purchased from Sweden, Israel or Italy - it is a simple purchase. But in case it is procured in significant numbers from US or Russia, it is a wider issue, as it is then seen to establish a strategic relationship. The first involves military initiative, the latter calls for 'political strategy'.

Now assuming that in the coming years India is going to be a major military power (perhaps 3rd or 4th in the world), we will, in all probability, have military responsibilities globally, which we may have to discharge in partnership with other major democratic nations. It is thus imperative that we construct a comprehensive strategy for defence acquisition, not in terms of individual items of equipment, but in the larger context of acquisitions for an entire spectrum of inter-related technologies and their successful incorporation.

In the formulation and implementation of our inclusive, broad based and overarching strategy, we would be well served to look at existing trends, the world over. While most industrialized nations are cutting back on their defence expenditures, there is a much smaller; more 'strategy minded' group - consisting of only a few advanced nations - that is increasing its defence outlays. Leading the pack is United States, which accounts for more than half of the world's defence expenditure and (perhaps more interestingly) 2/3rd of the world defence R&D. It is closely followed by China and Russia. India, as it is emerging as a major player in the international scene. It is also an active member of the latter club.

Importantly, for aspiring nations there are only two independent sources of defence technology generation in the world - United States and Russia. (European technology, despite efforts to

make it independent, is increasingly getting reliant on the United States through company mergers and acquisitions).

There have been three examples of major transfers of defence technologies in 20th century history. The first of these was the Treaty of Rapallo signed between Germany and Communist Russia in the 1920s, which resulted in the Germans migrating in droves to Russia to teach them all about weapon designing, and production technology. Artem Mikoyan, the designer of the MIGs, was taught about aircraft design, by the Germans. Then, in the 50s, the Soviet Union agreed to help China become a major military power by transferring technology wholesale. The Sino-Soviet ideological dispute, in 1960, put an end to the relationship.. The third example - that of the present Russian supply of defence equipment and technology to China - is most instructive, as it marks the fresh beginning of strategic relations between two countries that had, until a few years back, militarily confronted each other and had a severed defence cooperation relationship.

Curiously, the Chinese defence industry benefited most from the migration of Russian defence engineers and scientists in large numbers to China after they became jobless at the end of the Cold War. Yet, the Russians have not leased out nuclear submarines to the Chinese and do not help them in building their own nuclear submarine. Nor the Russians have a joint development programme for fifth generation combat aircraft. As they have with India. The Sino-Russian relationship is therefore, not as intimate as it outwardly appears. Therefore, in establishing and maintaining a close strategic relationship with Russia, we have a definite advantage over China.

The United States is also enthusiastic about opening up its defence market and has signed a military framework agreement with India, also concluding an end-use monitoring agreement. This was a direct result of the Indo-US strategic partnership initiated in 2005.. We however, need to make up our minds and formulate a strategy about the kind of platforms, equipment, armament and technologies that must be acquired from US and Russia. Getting submarines from Russia is an obvious choice – naval vessels and armour too, are already on our list. In fact, logically thinking, our requirements are so large we could divide them into two categories - so that we are able to do business with both. Given the present international situation, India would shortly be one of the largest markets for arms in the world. This could give us a lot of ‘bargaining power’ and make it advantageous to use it - one way or the other, or better still - both ways. There are, of course, people who have reservations about dealing with the United States on arms supplies. It however, needs to be looked at pragmatically.

It is worth recalling that the Chinese after their split and confrontation with Russia have again resumed an arms purchase relationship and nobody there raises the question of the Russians being dependable. In our case too, we should look at the matter from the perspective of ‘realpolitik’: our national interests and those of the other party and how much they overlap.

A case in point is that of the Indian Air Force, where the requirements are large enough to consider two lines of research and production. Major countries of the world have two lines of aircraft production - Russia has MIG and Sukhoi; the US, Boeing and Lockheed-Martin. In these circumstances it would be to India’s advantage to bear in mind the geo-strategic situation as it is evolving and how best it can make use of it in order to cope with the challenges that we have.

Our political parties,play real politik in domestic politics all the time.Yesterday's adversaries become today's coalition partners.Past history is rarely invoked in domestic political interactions.However in international relations where real politik must have its sway considerations of ideology and past historical wrongs are raised.. It is time we realized that raising issues of ideology, experiences or memories of past wrong doings does not help in international politics.. We must approach this in a bi-partisan manner and help in the evolution of a strategy that serves our national interest. \*\*\*\*\*

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