



# ISSUE BRIEF

No. 143

June 2018

## Creation of Defence Planning Committee: A Bold Step towards Defence Preparedness



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### Introduction

The Government of India has recently revamped the existing defence planning system in the country and has created a Defence Planning Committee (DPC) under the chairmanship of the National Security Adviser (NSA). This new measure by the present government is considered to be one of the boldest defence reforms in the last few decades and it is likely to have far-reaching consequences on the defence planning as well as on the defence preparedness of India<sup>1</sup>. This new institutional mechanism has been set up as a permanent body, with an intention to facilitate a comprehensive and integrated planning on the defence matters, which is a vital ingredient for the country's defence preparedness. The DPC is mandated to prepare a draft national security strategy besides undertaking a defence review and formulating an international defence engagement strategy. As per the media reports, the ibid step of the Government of India is one of the much-needed moves towards ramping up the languorous process of defence acquisition<sup>2</sup>.

### Challenges Persisting in the Extant System of Defence Planning

The genesis of the creation of the DPC by the central government probably lies in the existing

### Key Points

1. The government of India has recently revamped the existing defence planning system in the country and has created a Defence Planning Committee (DPC) under the chairmanship of the National Security Adviser (NSA).
2. This new measure by the present government is considered to be one of the boldest defence reforms in the last few decades and is likely to have far reaching consequences on the defence planning as well as on the defence preparedness of India.
3. This new institutional mechanism has been set up as a permanent body, with an intention to facilitate a comprehensive and integrated planning on defence matters, which is a vital ingredient for the country's defence preparedness.
4. The DPC is mandated to prepare a draft national security strategy besides undertaking defence review and formulating an international defence engagement strategy.
5. The creation of DPC probably lies in the existing challenges being faced by the nation's defence planning machinery.
6. Apart from Chairman (NSA), DPC comprises the chairman of the chiefs of staff committee, three service chiefs, defence secretary, foreign secretary and expenditure secretary, with HQ IDS performing the task of member secretary.

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## Creation of Defence Planning Committee ...

challenges being faced by the nation's defence planning machinery. A few months ago, an internal report of the defence ministry, commissioned by Mr Subhash Bhamre, Minister of State, pointed out some serious procedural lapses in the defence procurement, which also included lack of synergy among stakeholders and poor understanding leading to delays averaging 52 months<sup>3</sup>. In the past several decades, various committees have also given their reports suggesting reforms in the defence sector. Some of the significant challenges<sup>4</sup> persisting in the extant system of India's defence planning are as under:

- **Issue of Uncertainty.** This has remained one of the primary challenges of the defence planning.
- **Lack of an Integrated Approach.** The Indian defence planning so far has been working in silos and this silo-driven approach has resulted in the lack of an integrated view in defence planning. The Armed Forces, as well as the civilian bureaucracy and defence agencies, are often seen to be working at cross-purposes. Further, the Army, Navy and Air Force are often perceived to be driving their own agenda at various levels.
- **Absence of National Security Doctrine.** The Indian defence planning process is greatly handicapped by the absence of a national security doctrine. It also suffers from the lack of interservice prioritisation as well as the requisite flexibility. The situation becomes more alarming as there is lack of commitment of funds beyond the financial year.
- **Lack of Synchronization among Armed Forces.** There is a serious lack of synergy among the top brass of the three Armed Forces with regards to the nature of threats perceived and the kind of future warfare India is likely to witness.
- **Lack of Adequate Budget Support.** As the Armed Forces need to be well-prepared to face any kind of possible future threat to the country, including the much-talked-about two-front war, the budget support provided for the modernisation of the armed forces in the budget for the Fiscal Year 2018-19, is far from making any significant progress towards that direction. The recent testimony of the Vice Chief of Army Staff before the parliamentary standing committee on defence that the budget allotted to the defence forces was hardly enough to complete the committed payments for the emergency procurements already

made, and is far away from pursuing an ambitious defence modernisation plan, is quite indicative of the alarming situation.

- **Reforming the Higher Defence Planning System.** This has been the key requirement for India since long so that the scarce resources of the country can be effectively managed and also be aligned to the political objectives.
- **Absence of an Indian Grand Strategy.** It is felt that there is an absence of an Indian grand strategy which can set out the political objectives for India. The grand strategy could have ensured that the developments in various sectors such as defence, economic, social and educational are coordinated towards achieving these political objectives.

### Aim and Composition of DPC

The aim of the DPC is to leverage this high powered, cross-governmental body to enhance the country's ability for long-term strategising. This high-powered committee has a cross section of members drawn from the higher echelons of the civil and military services, with the NSA at the helm. Apart from the Chairman (NSA), the DPC comprises various members including the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, three Armed Forces Chiefs, Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary and Expenditure Secretary. The Chief of Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) will perform the task of the member secretary of the DPC. Besides this, the NSA is empowered to co-opt other members as and when required.

### Charter of Duties of the DPC

The DPC has been tasked with drafting reports on 'the national security strategy, international defence engagement strategy, road map to build a defence manufacturing ecosystem, strategy to boost defence exports and priority capability developments plans'. The charter of duties of the DPC<sup>5</sup> is listed as under:

- To analyse and evaluate all relevant inputs related to defence planning, which includes—the national defence and security priorities, foreign policy imperatives, relevant strategic and security-related doctrines, defence acquisition and infrastructure development plans, including the 15-year Long-Term Integrated Perspective Plan, defence technology and development of the Indian defence industry as well as global technological advancement.

- To prepare at least five different sets of drafts, which include the following<sup>6</sup>:
  - National security strategy, strategic defence review and doctrines.
  - International defence engagement strategy.
  - Road map to build defence manufacturing ecosystem.
  - Strategy to boost defence exports.
  - Prioritised capability development plans for the Armed Forces over different timeframes in consonance with the overall priorities, strategies and the likely resource flows.
- In order to assist the functioning of the DPC, the new mechanism provides for four subcommittees, which are as under:
  - Subcommittee on Policy and Strategy.
  - Subcommittee on Plans and Capability Development.
  - Subcommittee on Defence Diplomacy.
  - Subcommittee on Defence Manufacturing Eco-System.
- The reports of the DPC will be submitted to the Defence Minister and further approval would be taken as required.
- The DPC will be evaluating the foreign policy imperatives with regard to India and will chalk out a strategy for international engagements. This would also include exports of military goods produced in India as well as foreign assistance programmes to enhance India's military footprint through defence diplomacy.
- The DPC is expected to clearly articulate the key national security strategy, defence strategy and military strategy.
- It is expected to prioritise defence and security requirements as per the likely available resources while at the same time, providing adequate focus on the emerging security challenges and technological advancements.
- The DPC will be advising the government regarding the various measures required to be undertaken for establishment and development of a strong indigenous defence manufacturing base in India.

### Significant Aspects of the DPC

There is a need for a transformative shift in the mindset, structures and processes pertaining to the Indian defence planning. The need for effective strategic defence planning becomes more pronounced in view of the rapidly evolving security environment in our neighbourhood as well as a near-permanent pressure on the country's scarce resources. Some of the key aspects of the DPC are listed below:

- The DPC is expected to optimally manage the entire process of defence planning in the most effective and coordinated manner in order to produce the most effective and modern force structure based on a carefully worked out long-term plan.
- The formulation of DPC is likely to speed up the defence acquisition process to a great extent with a long-term view and also give due considerations to India's current and future security challenges. This would help make India's defence preparedness more than an acquisition-centric exercise.

### Comments

The formation of DPC is likely to bridge a key gap in the existing defence planning mechanism. As the creation of the post of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) is not finding favour with successive political dispensations, the existing system of HQ IDS-led planning is perceived to have given way to the parochial interests of various stakeholders<sup>7</sup>.

This has had an adverse impact on how the security threats to the nation are perceived by various security agencies as well as how the scarce resources are distributed among the Armed Forces and further within the various branches of Army, Navy and Air Force. Furthermore, the existing planning process has had very little control over the aspects of indigenisation and self-reliance in defence procurement matters, which are being vigorously pursued through the Make in India programme of the present government.

It is felt that the extant system of defence planning has resulted in the provision of less than adequate resources to meet numerous security challenges and for chasing goals that were not of immediate priority. This has also led to the duplication and wastage of scarce resources, giving less than required focus on the new technological developments while pursuing manpower-driven military modernisation. Further, the extant system of defence planning has resulted in the evolution of a

defence research and development system and a defence manufacturing base, which are far away from attaining self-reliance.

Notwithstanding the above, with the formation of the DPC, the defence planning process is expected to become more rational as well as provide a much-needed boost to defence preparedness. It is expected that the DPC would clearly articulate the key national security/defence/military goals as well as prioritise the defence and security requirements as per the likely available resources. It would also provide adequate focus on the emerging security challenges, technological advancements and the establishment of a strong indigenous defence manufacturing base.

Some sceptics may ask the question as to how the creation of yet another committee will sort out the complexities of the defence procurement and planning. However, the answer to that seems to be simple. The chair of the committee that is, the NSA is a person of formidable capability, who has an overarching knowledge of the direction of the country's national security needs<sup>8</sup>. Further, the inclusion of all relevant ministries in the committee will permit 'across the table decision-making' to a great extent. This will reduce the bureaucracy and red-tapism in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) substantially and will further help in a faster, timely and efficient system of defence procurements.

Though the setting up of the committee is a welcome development, this cannot be a substitute for a virtual top-down restructuring of the institutions and ministries involved in defence and security planning. It is expected that the earlier issues such as setting up of theatre commands, reorganisation of the MoD into a truly 'Integrated HQ of MoD' as well as appointment of the CDS will also fructify soon.

Further, the Armed Forces need to sit together and decide as to what kind of a war is likely to be fought in the next two decades, without referring to the past glories of air or land battles and the like. It is a well-known fact that the warfighting has changed fundamentally, particularly after the acquisition of the robust nuclear capability by us as well as our adversaries and the increased possibility of cyber, electronic and hybrid warfare. Therefore, in order to address such issues, the

DPC is expected to outline a military doctrine as an entirely independent panel. Moreover, making HQ IDS the secretariat of this very important committee will result in achieving higher levels of jointness among the Armed Forces in various activities, including training, planning, resource allocation, standardisation of equipment and weapon systems and execution.

### Way Ahead for DPC

The inaugural meeting of the newly formed DPC was held on May 03, 2018, under the chairmanship of the NSA<sup>9</sup>, which was attended by all the Armed Forces Chiefs, Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary, Expenditure Secretary and the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff, who is the member secretary to the DPC. The members had deliberated about the geostrategic landscape and agreed to chart out a time-bound action plan in keeping with its broad mandate. The draft national security strategy is also likely to have been discussed during this meeting.

The DPC has also been mandated to prepare drafts on some other vital subjects, including the international defence engagement strategy, roadmap to build a defence manufacturing ecosystem, to boost defence exports and prioritise the capability development plans for the Armed Forces. For the execution of these tasks, the DPC would first analyse the relevant inputs for defence planning such as national defence and security-related doctrines, foreign policy imperatives, operational directives, defence acquisition plans, the Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan, and so forth.

### Conclusion

The establishment of DPC under the chairmanship of the NSA is one of the most significant defence policy reforms undertaken by the government during the past few decades, which has revamped the existing defence planning system in the country<sup>10</sup>. This new institutional mechanism, which is set up as a permanent body, is intended to facilitate a comprehensive and integrated planning on the defence matters. It is one of the vital ingredients of the defence preparedness, which was missing so far in the existing mechanism. Needless to say, the formulation of the DPC will have a far-reaching consequence on the way in which the defence planning is undertaken in India.

## ... A Bold Step towards Defence Preparedness

The formation of the DPC is a significant development also from the point of view that today, India is at the threshold of a more active and prominent role in the regional and international space<sup>11</sup>. A growing India wants to exert its rightful place in the regional as well as

the international arena, which would be possible only if India has substantial military and economic power. It is, therefore, important that a detailed road map with fixed timelines and accountability be chalked out, which should address our national security concerns comprehensively.

### Notes

1. <http://www.insightsonindia.com/2018/04/26/insights-into-editorial-creation-of-defence-planning-committee-a-step-towards-credible-defence-preparedness/>; published on April 26, 2018.
2. Tara Kartha, "Government of India's Move to Set Up Defence Planning Committee Welcome, but Comprehensive Overhaul of Core Ministries Needed," *Firstpost*, (April 19, 2018). <https://www.firstpost.com/india/Govt-of-Indias-move-to-set-up-defence-planning-committee-welcome-but-comprehensive-overhaul-of-core-ministries-needed/>.
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11. Arun Sahni, "Defence Planning Committee Right Step for National Security, but Expectations Should be Rooted in Reality," *Firstpost*, (April 26, 2018). <https://www.firstpost.com/india/defence-planning-committee-right-step-for-national-security-but-expectations-should-be-rooted-in-reality-4446275>.

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