

Creation of Defence Planning Committee: A Step towards Credible Defence Preparedness



India is probably the only large country in the world which is overwhelmingly dependent on external sources for **its defence requirements**. India remains the world's **largest weapons importer** over a five-year period according to latest report of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on global arms purchases released recently.

Context:

In a significant defence policy reform, the government has revamped the existing defence planning system by establishing a Defence Planning Committee (DPC) under the chairmanship of the National Security Adviser (NSA).

This new institutional mechanism, set up as a permanent body, is intended to “facilitate a comprehensive and integrated planning for defence matters” – a vital ingredient in defence preparedness.

The committee, which will be a permanent body, will prepare a draft national security strategy besides undertaking a strategic defence review and formulating an international defence engagement strategy.

The new measure, arguably the boldest defence reform in decades, is likely to have a far reaching consequence on the way defence planning is undertaken and on defence preparedness.

Aim of the Defence Planning Committee:

The aim is **to leverage this cross-governmental body**—comprising the chairman of the chiefs of staff committee, three service chiefs, the defence, expenditure and foreign secretaries—to enhance India's ability to do some long-term strategizing.

The DPC is being tasked with drafting reports on “national security strategy, international defence engagement strategy, road map to build a defence manufacturing ecosystem, strategy to boost defence exports, and priority capability development plans”.

The charter of duties of the DPC :

- To analyse and evaluate all relevant inputs relating 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 (LTIPP), defence technology and development of the Indian defence industry and global technological advancement.

- To prepare at least **five different sets of drafts** including:
 - National security strategy, strategic defence review and doctrines;
 - International defence engagement strategy;
 - Roadmap to build defence manufacturing eco-system;
 - Strategy to boost defence exports; and
 - Prioritised capability development plans for the armed forces over different time-frames in consonance with the overall priorities, strategies and likely resource flows.

Challenges that existed till now:

- The central challenge in defence planning remains the issue of uncertainty.
- Indian defence planning stands at a crossroads. The silo-driven approach to defence planning has resulted in the lack of an integrated view. The three services as well as the civilian and defence agencies are often seen to be working at cross purposes. Instead, individual services tend to be driving the agenda at their own levels.
- “The defence planning process is greatly handicapped by the absence of a national security doctrine, and commitment of funds beyond the financial year. It also suffers from a lack of inter-service prioritization, as well as the requisite flexibility”.
- This lack of synchronization was underscored recently. On the one hand, the Indian Army chief was talking of a two-front war. On the other, the vice-chief of army staff was testifying before the parliamentary standing committee on defence that the budget allocated to the defence forces was hardly enough to complete the committed payments for the emergency procurements already made, let alone for pursuing an ambitious defence modernization plan.
- Reforming this system remains a core requirement for India to adequately manage its scarce resources and align these with political objectives.
- Indeed, the absence of an Indian “grand strategy” that sets out political objectives for Indian power projection—and then ensures military, economic, intelligence and educational development—coordinated toward these objectives, has been a perennial topic of discussion within Indian strategic circles.

Conclusion:

In the Indian context, a transformative shift in mindset, structures and processes is needed. Rapidly evolving security environment as well as a near permanent pressure on scarce resources underscores the need for strategic defence planning.

It is of prime importance that the process is optimally managed to produce the most effective force structure based on a carefully worked out long term plan, in the most cost effective manner.

The Defence Planning Committee will thus, hopefully, speed up defence acquisitions, with a long-term view on how to fit them into India's current and future security challenges. This would help make India's defence preparedness more than an acquisition centric exercise.

It will **'evaluate foreign policy imperatives'** and also chalk out a strategy for international engagements that would include exports of products made in India and foreign assistance programmes to enhance India's military footprint through defence diplomacy.

The DPC is expected to clearly articulate the key national security/ defence/ military goals as well as prioritise defence and security requirements as per the likely available resources while at the same time providing adequate focus on emerging security challenges, technological advancements, and establishing a strong indigenous defence manufacturing base.