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The Indian Republic to attain and sustain the status of a credible predominant military power in South Asia and to ascend the aspirational ladder of emerging as a Major Global Power needs a 2 million strong Indian Army. Any advocacy in political, strategic and military hierarchy circles to downsize the Indian Army from its present levels of 1.3 million is strategically imprudent and negates India's national aspirations.

India's credible military power levels which is a geopolitical imperative in the prevailing security environment in 2019 and thereafter cannot be achieved at 'basement bargain rates'. Military power is expensive and India has to divert resources from populist and financially wasteful political schemes of past Governments to build up the Indian Army.

More tellingly, Indian Army's war preparedness grossly neglected by the Government in ten years of 2004-14 has left in its wake glaring voids in Indian Army's fighting machine which have to be fast tracked to make up the voids. Any fast tracking of war -preparedness in terms of military inventories and completion of War Wastage stocking levels needs short circuiting of ponderous defence acquisition processes and also entails increased costs.

Indian Army strengths and force structures cannot be modelled on Western templates strictly related to threat assessments. India unlike United States and Europe shares contiguous land borders with its two military adversaries, namely China and Pakistan. Both have in the past launched aggressive wars at short notice against India to achieve political goals.

Indian Army's strength, size and force structures need to be therefore to be balanced both for physical manning of its long land borders with China and Pakistan as well as threat assessments of enemy plans.

In evaluating threat assessments of China and Pakistan to India's national security India cannot afford to revert to Nehruvian principles of interpreting China and Pakistan's intentions. Perforce Indian Army strengths and force structures need to be based squarely on China's and Pakistan's war waging capabilities against India.

In 2019, India stares at the possibilities of a Dual China-Pakistan Threat challenging its geopolitical strengths and our adversaries open intents to challenge India's rise in the power calculus of Indo Pacific and global security.

The Indian Army has to shoulder the following onerous security tasks/challenges which on detailed examination would reveal that Indian Army's strength cannot be downsized without resultant security risks but conversely dictate increased manpower and organisations to hone its operational effectiveness:

- Defend the territorial integrity and sanctity of India's borders with China (3,488 km), Pakistan (3,323 km), Bangladesh (4,076 km), Myanmar (1,648 km), Nepal (1,571 km) and Bhutan (699 km). The Indian Army performs this task either by direct physical manning of the borders or as back-up support to Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), in case of the last three named.
- India's borders with China and Pakistan are 'Live Borders' militarily and need increased number of 'boots on te ground.
- Indian Army at all times has to be operationally ready to meet conflict escalation and short notice aggression by Pakistan and China by their offensive operations or military brinkmanship. This requires sizeable number of Indian Army Formations on its Order of Battle (ORBAT)
- Indian Army needs a number of Strike Corps both against Pakistan and China for offensive operations as well as Strike Corps battle-ready in peace and war, as well as to provide existential conventional deterrence to its enemies.
- Two separate Mountain Strike Corps are required for Eastern and Western Theatres. The Western Theatre where the China-Pakistan Axis can really come into play needs a dedicated Mountain Strike Corps.
- With terrorism threat against India with external links gaining more prominence, the Indian Army needs to cater for over-sized Special Forces setup to liquidate such challenges beyond the scope of CAPFs. Mumbai 26/11 carnage would have been nipped in the bud in the first 24 hours if Indian Army would have been used byte Congress Government.

In addition to the above vital security roles of physical manning of China and Pakistan borders, India in coming decades will be called upon to shoulder its fair load of regional security commitments as the nett provider of regional security in close partnership with the United States , Japan and Australia. India can no longer adopt a 'Hands Off 'attitude towards regional conflicts and conflict escalation.

To meet such challenges Indian Army would need to create Expeditionary Forces capabilities with both airborne and amphibious capabilities.

Indian Army force requirements for such regional commitments have to be created over and above the two vital security roles of defending the territorial sovereignty of the India Republic both by defensive operations and offensive warfare capabilities in form of Strike Corps covering both the Pakistan Threat and China Threat.

With China-Pakistan Axis militarily concretising as evident in 2019, no scope exists for Indian Army juggling its Reserve Formations between the Pakistan Front and the China Front as done in earlier decades. Dedicated additional Reserve Formations would be required for both Fronts.

India can no longer afford to cut defence expenditure by downsizing the strength of the Indian Army. In terms of national security imperatives such an advocacy to cut down the operational strength of the Indian Army can be viewed as downright suicidal. The Indian Army hierarchy should not become willing accomplices in cutting the strength of the Indian Army when no such visible cuts seem to be in the offing in relation to the Chinese Army and the Pakistan Army.

Streamlining of Indian Army force structures is a viable option only in terms of reorganising the logistics infrastructure without touching the organic logistics complement of Strike Formations. Savings of manpower from logistics pruning of static regional military set-ups should be diverted to completing shortfalls of manpower of Fighting Formations.

Indian Army downsizing of its strength is a periodic bug which bites Indian Army hierarchy from political and bureaucratic pressures of the Ministry of Defence. Also, pressures from the Finance Ministry too come into play. Such pressures emanate solely from balancing the defence expenditure figures without regard to Indian Army's vital operational roles and commitments.

The Indian Army military hierarchy should therefore be honour bound not to allow Indian Army's fighting strengths, capabilities and war preparedness lapse into the Nehruvian 'Pre-1962 Syndrome'. It should firmly oppose any such political or bureaucratic pressures.

Ironically, no debate seems to be emerging in tandem in Indian strategic community circles as to why the strengths of the Para Military Forces and the Central Armed Police Forces is exponentially increasing by the day but calls are made only on the Indian Army downsizing?

With the contextual backdrop delineated, one can now briefly examine the two vital security roles of the Indian Army in terms of physical

manning of India's borders with China and Pakistan, and also having in place existentially strong Strike Forces to provide credible conventional deterrence.

The point already stands made that unlike United States and Europe, India has the military challenge of manning long land borders which are disputed by China and Pakistan. The terrain encompasses icy Himalayan terrain to plains, desert and jungles. These terrain conditions and the climatic and weather factors need extensive manpower as technology is not effective in terms of surveillance. These types of terrains eat up military manpower and therefore defensive deployments of Indian Army cannot be cut down. Nor can the oversized Central Armed Police Forces be operationally empowered to take over Indian Army tasks except in some sectors more as 'trip-wires' than sustained defensive operations.

Compounding the above challenge is the long-held Indian security axiom of "No Loss of Territory" to China or Pakistan in peace and war. This multiplies the number of Forces required for conventional defence.

Indian Army Strike Formations need to be credible both in terms of operational punch and complete strengths of manpower and materiel. The niggardly approach of the previous Government towards raising of China-centric Mountain Strike Corps, reportedly still not complete, affects the credible conventional deterrence of the Indian Army.

Same has been the case of the Special Forces Command and the Cyber Warfare Command. These should have come into being years back and be effective in 2019. Strongly to be emphasised is that it is the ponderous Indian Ministry of Defence that needs to be downsized drastically where each section of functions are duplicated from the three Services Headquarters. Wasteful expenditures indeed when no scope functionally exists for duplication of functions being performed by the three Services Headquarters.

If the Indian Prime Minister can run a country of the vast size of India with a negligible Prime Minister's Office to run governance of India's 1300 million citizens why does the Ministry of Defence need hundreds of bureaucratic functionaries and civilian staff to run a million plus Armed Forces?

Realistically, the flab is in the Ministry of Defence oversized staffing which in terms of good management dictating minimum points of coordination extends to vast network of subterranean entities. All of this leads to inordinate delays in defence decision making and a big financial load on India's defence budget which profitably could be spent on adding more punch to Indian Army's operational capabilities.

All that is required a limited size Defence Minister's Office and leave the remainder functions to the three Services Chiefs and their Headquarters who have spent a lifetime in running and honing India's war-machine to good effect.

Similarly, under the Ministry of Defence there are bloated bureaucracies in Controllers of Defence Accounts, Defence Research and

Development Organisation, Defence Estates management, Military Engineering Services and Ordnance Factories Board. It is these outfits that need serious downsizing. A few of these have been named.

Management consultants should be outsourced to review the size and functions of the Ministry of Defence and the major set-ups directly controlled by it.

The Border Roads Organisation is no longer a productive organisation. The same tasks can speedily be executed by India's private sector to meet operationally urgent requirement of strategic roads on India's Northern Borders. This Organisation ends to be completely wound up plagued as it is by bureaucratic rivalries.

Pensions of Military Veterans should be a separate Budget allocation divorced from the Defence Budget and such allocations is diverted to acquisition of weapons and equipment. Military Veterans pensions are a sacred obligation of any Indian Government and India owes a 'National Debt of Honour' which the Modi Government has redeemed after decades of neglect by OROP entitlements. The task must continue by establishing a separate Budget Head.

Concluding, it needs to be strongly emphasised that no scope exists for downsizing the Indian Army. India's national aspirational goals both regional and global strongly militate against such a step as imprudent. India needs a 2 million strong Indian Army in view of the contextual threatening geopolitical environment. The strength of the Indian Army needs to be based on India's security needs and military threats from China and Pakistan. The Indian Republic in 2019 abounds in economic resources which need only diversion from politically populist financially wasteful schemes of the past Governments.

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