

National Security Strategy

Imperatives for the Raksha Mantri



It is the government's most important duty to ensure that if war breaks out, the armed forces are absolutely ready to face the adversary: well equipped, well trained and in high spirits, urges Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal.

In 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed over the reins of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to Nirmala Sitharaman, a trusted colleague in the Union council of ministers. The minister must muster all her management skills to set the right priorities for the MoD and the armed forces. She will need to lead from the front and work closely with leadership of the armed forces, the bureaucracy and her counterparts in the other ministries to put defence preparedness back on the rails and give a fillip to the stalled process of military modernisation.

As a member of the Cabinet Committee on Security, the minister will play an important role in formulating policies to successfully manage the threats and challenges facing the country.

Defence Preparedness

The foremost item on the defence minister's agenda should be to address the 'critical hollowness' plaguing defence preparedness.

This was the term used by General VK Singh, then the chief of the army staff, in the report he wrote to the then prime minister in May 2012.

Major operational deficiencies exist in the authorised war establishment of the three services. For example, several Army corps do not have independent artillery brigades that are authorised to them. These deficiencies must be made up early in order to increase combat efficiency. Large-scale deficiencies in ammunition and important items of equipment continue to hinder readiness for war and the ability to sustain operations over anticipated time periods.

The army reportedly has some varieties of ammunition for barely ten days of conflict and it will cost over Rs 25,000 crore (Rs 250 billion) to replenish the stocks to the minimum required levels. During the Kargil conflict in 1999, 50,000 rounds of ammunition had to be imported from South Africa for the Bofors howitzers. The

occurrence of such a situation during a crisis must be avoided through a prudent replenishment and stocking policy.

Modern wars are fought mostly during the hours of darkness, but most of the infantry battalions and many of the armoured fighting vehicles – tanks and infantry combat vehicles – are still 'night blind'.

Warships, submarines, fighter aircraft, light helicopters, artillery guns, ground-based air defence, command and control, surveillance and reconnaissance systems, are either held in inadequate numbers or bordering on obsolescence.

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Cicero had asked many centuries ago: "For if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

Unlike other major democracies, India does not have a clearly articulated national security strategy. The defence minister should take the lead in acting as the