

ARM & EQUIP THE INFANTRYMAN FROM HEAD TO HEEL

“ THE INDIAN ARMY NEEDS ALMOST EVERYTHING EXCEPT COURAGE’

Time Magazine - December 1962

The Time magazine aptly summarised the operational performance and preparedness of the Indian army during the 1962 conflict. That may not be true today for the armed forces, but may still hold good to a large extent for the Indian soldier and the infantry in particular. General V K Singh former army chief in a much publicised 12 March 2012 letter to the then Prime Minister painted a grim picture of the operational capabilities of the 1.18-million strong army. A major concern in the letter was quote *“ large scale voids in essential weaponry as well as critical surveillance and night-fighting capabilities in the over 350 infantry and special forces' battalions.”* The voids in the infantry remain though the efforts to give impetus to modernisation programmes and procurements has been set in motion.

The prevailing geopolitical scenario clubbed with the advancement in technology necessitates that the Infantry has to be prepared to fight in all types of terrain in the entire spectrum of conflict. In the Indian context, all disputed and sensitive borders are in the mountainous and high altitude regions with predominantly infantry deployment and employment. The 1947-48 Kashmir war, the 1962 Sino - India conflict and the 1999 Kargil war were mountain wars fought mainly by the infantry and artillery, of course duly supported by all combat support arms and services. The ongoing counter terrorism (CT) and counter insurgency(CI) operations are infantry based operations. It is imperative that the Army focus should be on modernisation of the infantry. The unacceptable delays in procurement of infantry weapons figured prominently in the Army Commanders conference in October 2017, with the Chief General Bipin Rawat stating *“ Our approach to procurement process needs to be balanced with focus at the right places”*, leaving no doubts about the army's concerns and focus on finally arming the infantry soldier and units. The infantry comprises nearly 40% of the 1.18 million army.

After nearly a decade long of 'Marking Time' under the previous regime, the Raksha Mantri's in the last few years have demonstrated an urgent and positive response to modernisation, signing 110 contracts worth 1,13,995 crores and accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) to 101 projects at a cost of 2,39,000 crores as of last financial year. All these are high visibility mega procurements with long gestation period, though essential for modernisation of our armed forces. The immediate need is to modernise the infantry, and in an unprecedented and much appreciated move the RM Nirmala Sitharaman sanctioned 40, 000 crores for arming the much neglected infantry.

It is a well recognised fact that the Indian infantry is by far one of the most battle hardened and combat rich force in the world with the best soldiers and leaders at the fighting and functional level. It is also one of the most poorly and ill equipped force lacking even a properly functioning rifle, the INSAS being no more than a piece of metal. The urgency is to procure long pending arms and equipment for the Infantry, which directly enhances the fighting efficacy of the soldiers in contact, success in operations and minimizes casualties by provisioning basic small arms, protective gear, enhancing night fighting capability, surveillance and communication and battlefield mobility. Even the special forces which successfully executed the surgical strikes lack the requisite arms and equipment.

The soldier needs to be optimally armed and equipped from HEAD 2 HEAL to ensure operational effectiveness and survivability. The urgent and immediate procurements for the infantry and the army are

- 8,18,500 new generation assault rifles, of which approximately 2,50,000 7.62x51 mm assault rifles including night sights are planned to be procured ex import for its over 400 plus frontline infantry units. The envisaged cost of each rifle is around INR 200,000. Other arms and services are envisaged to be equipped indigenous rifles either developed by the DRDO or the OFB. This is likely to create problems of inventory management and maintenance. It may be more cost effective to procure one type of assault rifle with ToT and make in India. Costs can be curtailed by reducing the scaling of night sights to troops other than than the units likely to be in direct contact. Economy of scales will reduce costs if that is a criteria as this rifle can also be issued to the CAPF raising the numbers required to over 12 lacs.
- The INSAS close quarter battle (CQB) carbine project was foreclosed in 1999/2000 post kargil war. The army alone requires approximately 3,85,000 with 1,68,000 CQB carbines mostly for the infantry and 2,17,000 protective carbines for other

arms and services. The carbine is to weigh less than 3kg and be capable of a cyclic rate of fire of 600 rounds per minute with a range of 200 meters. The carbine for the infantry is also to be equipped with picatinny rail-mounted reflex and passive night sights, laser designators and detachable bayonets.

- The light machine gun (LMG) is an essential section weapon. The 5.56mm INSAS LMG has major defects and has been constantly under repairs/ upgrades. Over 43000 LMGs are required to equip the army alone.
- Spike Anti Tank Guided Missile was the only modernisation project of the Infantry which was on track though delayed. The man-portable Spike a state of the art third generation 'fire and forget' missile with a range of 200 to 2500m was to provide the infantry units the much needed anti tank capability essential for defence along both the Northern and Western borders. In what comes as a surprise, reportedly the MoD has taken a final decision to foreclose the project. The 500 mn USD deal envisaged purchase of 320 missile launchers, approx 8500 missiles and 15 training simulators, with an option clause of acquiring additional 1500 tankers and 30,000 missiles with Transfer of Technology(ToT). The trials were completed in 2012 and the procurement was at the final stages. The MoD decision to deprive the infantry of this critical firepower and anti tank capability defies logic. The capability gap now created is planned to be bridged in the long term by the DRDO who will develop and design a Man-Portable ATGM (MP-ATGM). The DRDO record in developing the man-portable design is dismal and it is nearly certain that like many others this project too will not see the end. An earlier effort to develop an ATGM for the infantry failed due to the weight and length of the missile which was for in excess of what any man can carry. According to Vivek Raghuvanshi reporting in the defence news "The Army also flagged the high cost of Nag Missile. The cost of the Nag ATGM is about half a million dollars, almost double the price of the Israeli Spike or American Javelin missile. Since the Nag ATGM did not meet the infantry requirement of man portability and was delayed by more than a decade, the Indian government had decided to finalize the import of shoulder-mounted Spike ATGMs from Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Limited of Israel. The Spike is a proven missile and has cleared all trials and tests in Indian conditions.

- The present Russian made Dragunov sniper rifle has also outlived its life. Nearly 6000 sniper rifles are required to equip the infantry.
- The Infantry battalions are also authorised three mini UAVs per battalion or over 1100 UAVs. The initial procurement is for 600 at a cost of 950 crores under the Buy Indian category. The system comprises of three platforms, one man pack ground control station (MPGCS), one launch and recovery systems, one remote video terminal (RVT), three complete sets of sensor package with all weather day and Night capability, two way airborne data relay to control UAV beyond line of sight among others. The weight specification is 35 Kg with a range of 10 km and loiter time of 45 minutes.

Soldiers to survive in the present and future battlefield scenarios need both individual and collective protection. Major equipment requirements are:-

- The DAC approved procurement of 1,86,138 Bullet Proof Jackets (BPJs) in 2009. The Army is still waiting for the BPJs which cost around Rs 50,000 each. The present requirement has gone up to over 3,50,000. The Army wants a modular jacket to provide "graded levels of protection". For a "low threat" when in CT/CI operation, the jacket should weigh less than 4 kg with a trauma pad and all-around soft armour plate, including front, sides, back, collar and neck. For conventional operations the soldiers will need higher protection like NIJ level 3 and accordingly the jacket's weight could go up to 11.5 kg, with hard armour plates for front, rear, sides, upper arms, groin and throat, capable of protecting against 7.62mm x 39mm mild steel core ammunition fired from an AK-47 from 10 metres.
- The procurement of ballistic helmets has reportedly fructified after a decade. It needs to be seen as to how long the army will take to be equipped with these helmets.
- Modular Individual Load Carrying Equipment (MILES) includes a harness, rucksack and hydration pack. Once introduced it will lessen the burden on the soldier and help him to carry his load properly as the

MILES is expected to distribute load equally on the back, which will ensure agility and speedy movement.

- RFI has been issued to procure Boot Anti Mine Infantry (BAMI) from foreign vendors with transfer of technology. BAMI is designed to protect troops from anti personnel mines. BAMI is for use in all types of terrain from high altitude, mountainous, plains, deserts, and jungles.
- Other urgent procurement for infantry in various stages include high resolution binoculars, digital compass , Night Vision Devices both image intensifiers and thermal imaging. Once procured these will enhance the operational efficacy and survival of the soldier.
- The infantry has a requirement of nearly 1300 light bullet-proof vehicles, in the 'Make Indian' category at a cost of Rs 720 crore. This is likely to increase exponentially, given the vast requirements of the Army and the CAPF.

These are some of the immediate and urgent needs of the infantry to enhance survivability, sustainability, and operational efficacy in conventional wars and CT/CI operations. The Defence Procurement Policy has been reviewed and the Strategic Partnership is expected to boost defence industry, however the need is also to review the procedures and processes or else these urgent procurements will all remain in the pipeline as hitherto, adversely impacting national security.

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