

## **ASSAULT RIFLE FOR THE INDIAN SOLDIER**

The Indian Army is by far one of the most battle hardened and combat rich force in the world. However, it is also one of the most poorly equipped force . After marking time for a decade under the previous regime, the MoD woke up from slumber under Raksha Mantri Mr Manohar Parrikar, signing 110 defence contracts worth 1,13,995 crores and according 'Acceptance of Necessity" (AON) for another 101 schemes valued at 2,39,000 crores. These are all big ticket projects critical to capability development of the armed forces. However , the urgent and critical need of a soldier to be equipped with an effective assault rifle remains unaddressed. The army should be provided the requisite wherewithal to fight effectively ensuring protection and survival of soldiers across the complete spectrum of conflict from small and Hybrid wars in the sub conventional domain to conventional and NBC wars.

Small Arms are the personal weapon of a soldier and is integral to his survival and fighting effectively. The 5.56 Indian Small Arms System (INSAS) needs urgent replacement, it has outlived its life and in actuals is a piece of metal as soldiers across the board do not have faith in this weapon. Many soldiers have lost their lives when an INSAS rifle had stoppages and would not fire when in contact in a do or die encounter. The preferred weapon of a soldier in Counter Terrorism (CT) operations is the AK 47, it is also the standard weapon used by the terrorist. The Infantry and the Army need a state of the art assault rifle and close quarter battle weapon to fight effectively, succeed and survive. The army after due deliberations sought a multi calibre multi role assault rifle with modular interchangeable parts , enhanced ranges and lethality in a weight class of 3.6 kgs ,to enable effective operations in all types of terrain and in all conflict situations. This was based on the feedback and operational requirement projected by field formations and the concept of operations. The fighting rationale is simple and followed by most world armies, that is stopping power in CI/CT Operations and maiming the enemy soldier rather than a kill in conventional war. An injured soldier is not only a long term burden for the adversary but also an immediate determinant to success of

an ongoing operation of war as injured soldiers need evacuation which reduces the bayonet strength and have a more demoralising effect on others in the battlefield. The GSQR was finalised after a number of iterations with all stakeholders which included the field force, heads of all arms and services, the DRDO, OFB and the DGQA. This was thereafter deliberated by the COAS , all Army commanders and Principal Staff Officers in a specially convened meeting in 2011 , with a single agenda of identifying the operational requirement of the future assault rifle of the army.

The November 2011 tender issued post detailed deliberations for the assault rifles required the weapon system to weigh no more than 3.6kg, fire both the indigenously produced ammunition of 5.56x45mm calibre and 7.62mm x 39mm projectiles with a barrel and magazine switch for employment in a stand-alone defensive or suppressive fire role. Fitted with Picatinny Rail-mounted reflex sights the rifles were also required to be equipped with day scopes and 40mm low- velocity under barrel grenade launcher (UBGL). The multi calibre assault rifles is not configured in the face of fire as some tend to believe , it is a task oriented configuration and can be easily done within the unit by the soldier himself with a little training. A fully loaded and configured lightweight assault rifle as demanded by the infantry in the 2011 GSQR is a long term solution to a major weakness of the army.

Post these deliberations tenders were issued to Colt, Beretta , Swiss Sig Sauer, the Ceska and Israel Weapons Industry. The tenders were canceled some time in 2015 as it is believed that the rifles could not come up to the requisite standards of the army. It is unfortunate that on account of our mindsets some serving officers and veterans could not comprehend the many advantages that accrue to a soldier fighting with a task configured weapon, thus calling for a review of the operational requirement leading to not only unacceptable delay, but also a violation of the established concept of maiming the enemy in war rather than kill.

As per Times of India report by Rajat Pandit of 28 Sep 2016 “ *India re-launched on Tuesday its global hunt for **new-generation assault rifles**, after similar attempts over the last decade failed due to unrealistic technical requirements and whiff of corruption, interspersed by debates on whether the gun should “kill” or merely “wound” adversaries*”. Ironical though, it was on the Night of 28/29 Sep 2016 that The Indian Army launched the highly sensitive and successful ‘Surgical Strikes’ across the line of Control in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, spearheaded by the Parachute Regiments Special Forces.

Indian Army floated the Request For Information (RFI) on 28 Sep 2016, for a world class 7.62x51mm calibre light weight, accurate Assault Rifle, with an effective range of 500m. The Rifle with lethality to achieve the objective of “shoot-to-kill” should be capable of providing the desired performance across all spectrums of employment in the Indian terrain and climatic conditions. Qualitative Requirement also states a modular design, capable of fitting and firing of Indian in-service UBGL , compatibility with all modern sights and accessories and provision for mounting the same. In terms of design, metallurgy and performance parameters, the Rifle and Sight shall be ‘State of the Art’ in order to remain relevant for next 25 to 30 years.

The Army aims to induct 65,000 rifles initially to equip the infantry units deployed in CT operations in J&K and the North-East, with another 1,20,000 to be manufactured in India. The final demand for the assault rifle when inducted will be upwards of 2 million taking into account the need of not only the 1.4 million armed forces but also the over 700,000 CAPF. the overall cost is likely to cross the \$1 billion-mark. According to some media reports as many as 18 vendors, including some Indian companies having a tie-up with foreign arms manufacturing firms, have envisioned interest in the project , which will entail ‘Transfer of Technology’ and ‘make in India’. The tender for procuring the assault rifles is likely to be issued in April/ May 2017.

Apart from assault rifles, the army also urgently needs to procure carbines, light machine guns and sniper rifles among other essential arms specially for the Infantry.

Though 7.62x51mm calibre is not the ideal assault rifle for conventional operations, the time for debate is long past as the army's requirement for replacement of the 5.56 mm INSAS is urgent and immediate. The army also needs to be cautious of the fact that the DRDO-OFB combine will as always try to push in the INSAS upgrade in the form of the Excalibre, which of course is equally ineffective. It is an imperative that the soldier be provided with an effective weapon in which he has complete trust and confidence, to ensure that he performs his war fighting tasks, achieving his mission with minimum casualties. A Rifle is an extension of the soldier and he needs the best.

1239 WORDS

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The Views expressed are personal