Issue Brief

Rearming the Indian Military
A National Defence Reset
for
Being Future Ready

CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES

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CLAWS

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Rearming the Indian Military:
A National Defence Reset for Being Future Ready

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India today faces an unforgiving strategic reality— a multiple-front threat defined by a revisionist China and a proxy war toolkit in Pakistan and an inimical Bangladesh. It's not about collusion but about fusion; it's not about the cold start but about the cold strike. The Galwan Valley clash in 2020 and the bold contours of Operation Sindoor in 2025 have etched an unmistakable truth—India's security doctrine, force structure, and institutional military thinking, requires a fundamental transformation. What is needed is not just modernisation but a **systemic reboot of our defence establishment**—a defence reset rooted in Indian realities and not on borrowed doctrines.

The 21st century demands a high level of operational readiness, agility, cross-domain integration, and a sharper political-military interface against diverse threats that emerge in real-time. It is time to think boldly—and Indian without delays or unpreparedness in our response matrix.

From Reactive Postures to Proactive Strategy

Our military posture has long remained responsive, rather than proactive. Whether it was the **Galwan incursions** that exposed our vulnerabilities in real-time ISR and terrain dominance, or **Operation Sindoor**, where our intelligence of attack failed and thereafter swift punitive strikes were dulled by delays in information warfare and political messaging—India has too often found itself catching up to the threat rather than pre-empting it.

A modern adversary does not wait for formal wars. China employs salami slicing in the Himalayas, backed by electronic jamming and psychological warfare. Pakistan operates through non-state actors, drone corridors, narco-terrorism, and a state-sponsored media echo chamber. The new player viz. Bangladesh— too small for a threat but speaks the voice of Pakistan ISI and China with the possibility of a hybrid front in NE. This demands a response that is proactive, pre-emptive, integrated, and lethal both kinetic and non-kinetic—across all domains.

Deterrence Reconstruct in a Multi-Threat Environment

The Indian security environment is now more volatile than ever before. While the threat from Pakistan remains persistent, it is now entwined with China's strategic coercion and increasingly assertive influence over India's eastern periphery, particularly in Bangladesh. The idea of a "one front" or even a "two and a half front" war has been overtaken by reality. What India now faces is a "two-in-one" front war—a scenario wherein collusion between adversaries, both kinetic and non-kinetic, plays out synchronously across multiple domains.

This evolution from collusion to **fusion warfare** represents a watershed moment. The Chinese stealth aircraft like the JF-35, anti-ballistic missile systems like the HQ-19, advanced airborne warning systems like the KJ-500, and increasingly lethal drone swarms manifesting in the battle space along with non-kinetic complementarity is a reality on India's Western and Northern borders.

China's arsenal is not a collusion but a fusion into Pakistan's armoury. This outsourcing of high-end technology to a hostile neighbour creates a situation where India's adversaries are not merely aligned—they are interoperable. What we face is a coalition of capabilities, designed to saturate, paralyse, and manipulate.

It is in this context that we must revisit and redefine deterrence. It is no longer enough to threaten punishment or maintain parity. Deterrence today must be **credible, pre-emptive, multi-domain, and politically resonant**. It must not only dissuade adversaries from action but deny them the will and the window to act in the first place.

Rethinking Theatre: From Geographical Theatres to Capability-Based Modelling

India's military geography has shaped our commands—Northern, Eastern, Western, Southern—locked into legacy front-based divisions. But threats today are not geographical—they are functional, fast-moving, collusive and multidomain. We must now build **capability-based integrated theatre commands** before deliberating the need and future of Integrated Theatre Geographical Commands:

- ***Space Command.*** To handle China, including Ladakh, Sikkim, and Arunachal, with embedded cyber, space, and mountain warfare divisions.

- *Cyber Command.* Focused on Pakistan's terror ecosystem, drone attacks, subversion in J&K, and information/cyber warfare. Both offensive and defensive cyber must be integrated into combat plans, including potential use for deception, infrastructure paralysis, and command disruption. Cyber warriors must be treated as frontline assets—trained, retained, and respected.

- *Electronic Warfare.* Electronic warfare must evolve to counter stealth threats, low-RCS drones, and spectrum denial. The future battlefield will be saturated with signals. The army must own and dominate that spectrum. Signature management and deception are again, to the fore, in these stand-off attacks. India needs to invest in them.

- *Deep Strike Missile and Drone/ Swarm Divisions per Theatre.* .Combining ISR, EW, missiles, and long-range drones/swarms. We must create specialised deep strike formations—Missile and Drone Brigades embedded within Artillery Divisions.

- *Integrated Air Defence Command.* While self-propelled AD can remain with IBGs or mechanised forces, the AD must be integrated as a multilayered and multi-tiered architecture for all aerial threats—fighter jets, missiles, drones, swarms and with real-time control and reporting system.

- *Integrated Maritime Command.* The future lies in maritime domain as the flank of decision. This must be shaped for future deterrence against all our adversaries.

- *Specialised Tri-Service Cognitive Warfare Structure.* Combining ISR, cyber offence/defence, psychological operations, narrative shaping, and perception management. Strategic messaging is as good as the 'bullet that kills'. The adversary, particularly Pakistan through its DG ISPR, has long weaponised information. India must develop a DG Strategic Communications capability to professionally manage perception, narrative, and truth—both in war and in peace. This is not propaganda— it is a combat multiplier.

These structures must not just coordinate but converge capabilities—Army ground forces, IAF air dominance, naval reach, cyber-electronic suppression, and information operations under an integrated structure.

Fighting With Data: India's Military Tech Paradox

India builds satellites, yet lacks pinpoint precision and real-time integrated battlefield data loops. We design missiles but delay electronic warfare suites. Our troops are valorous, but our battlefield management systems are decades behind.

To win the next war, we must operationalise **Command, Control, Communication, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (C5ISR)** into our DNA:

- Create a Tri-Services Digital Warfare Grid under a new Defence Technology Command.
- Predictive analysis and predictive battlespace awareness is a force multipliers. The defence forces must develop a tri-service AI-driven decision-support system and a combat-cloud-based targeting architecture.

The success of **Operation Sindoor's drone strikes** must now scale into standard operating capability—both for deterrence and for war-fighting. India cannot afford a digital disconnect in its next war.

Force Design: Ready, Agile, Lethal, Survivable and Multi-Role

India's armed forces must shift from mass to precision, from platform-centric thinking to **capability-centric design**. In the Galwan sector, rapid mobilisation and boots on the ground mattered. In Sindoor, it was quick precision strikes and target discrimination that defined effectiveness. Further, the readiness levels must graduate 'from Cold Start to Cold Strike'.

A modern Indian force must:

- Prioritise **mobile, integrated firepower units**—combining artillery, ISR, missiles, drones, and EW in single integrated brigades.
- Deploy **terrain-specific force design**: cold strike-capable Integrated Battle Groups for plains and mountains; air-mobile light infantry with integrated SF capability and integrated firepower brigades in high-altitude zones.
- Expand **Territorial Army and Reserve Units** for static security, freeing up regular forces for frontline operational agility.
- Institutionalise **multi-domain technology-oriented task forces as the next level of IBGs**: not just in name, but operationally fused.

We must make the Indian Army leaner but sharper; networked but nimble; lethal yet survivable and always spot operational readiness.

Narrative Warfare: The Battle Beyond Borders

A critical domain often neglected is strategic communication. The notion of victory is no longer absolute wins—it is about political optics, narrative dominance, and international legitimacy. Post-Galwan, China manipulated perceptions with maps and media. In Operation Sindoor, despite military success, India lagged in projecting the operation globally as a legitimate counter-terror response.

Narrative dominance is no longer an afterthought—it is a front.

India must establish:

- India must appoint a tri-service **DG Strategic Communications** to professionally manage perception, narrative, and truth—both in war and in peace.
- **Strategic Communication Divisions** within theatre commands with real-time coordination with the Ministry of External Affairs and Information & Broadcasting.
- Embed **media and psychological ops units** within formations for local counter-narratives in Kashmir, Ladakh, and the Northeast.
- Use India's tech talent to create **digital militias** capable of flooding hostile media with facts, videos, counter-propaganda, and psyops.
- Reclaim the global moral high ground through institutionalised storytelling, not just sporadic MEA briefings.

A military win without narrative dominance is half a victory.

Bureaucracy vs Battlespace: Who Wins First?

We need to 'reform the defence ecosystem'. The need is budgetary reforms and Smart Atmanirbharta. The present acquisition cycle for high-tech multi-domain is an antique. Bureaucratic inertia, fractured procurement systems, and linear R&D models will not deliver tomorrow's capabilities. Startups and defence tech innovators must be brought into the core of our ecosystem and supported not with rhetoric but with funding, mentorship, and integration into military planning.

A flexible budgeting model—focused not just on expenditure but on outcomes—should be the norm. Innovation must be incentivised, not punished by procedural orthodoxy. Both

envelop and reforms are foundational to a responsive outcome-oriented budget. Only a nimble institution can fight a nimble enemy. We must now 'organise to operate, not to administrate'.

Defence Diplomacy: Weapons, Alliances and Soft Deterrence

India must transition from being a buyer of peace to a **regional exporter of security**. Just as Make in India produced credible combat systems—Pinaka, Akash, Tejas, UAVs—it must now align exports with diplomacy.

- Forge military-industrial corridors with **ASEAN, IOR, and Gulf nations**, combining soft power and hard deterrence.
- Offer **military training, counter-terror expertise**, and ISR assistance to neighbours.
- Create a dedicated **Defence Diplomacy Directorate** under MEA-MoD with integrated attachés, logistics agreements, and joint R&D.

Strategic weight is not just built by force, but by **offering force as assurance to others**. Sindoor's lessons must travel.

A People's Military: Mindset, Morale, Mission

Defence reform is not just about systems— it's about mindsets.

- Build a **joint-service identity** through cross-postings, joint academies, and integrated career paths.
- Incentivise technological innovation by **recruiting lateral entries** from startups, IITs, and AI labs into cyber, ISR, and EW commands.
- The civil-military interface must be pan-India. India needs to embed Defence Advisers into state governments and disaster response teams.
- **Retool our Professional Military Education (PME).** Our training academies and staff colleges must prepare officers not only for command and leadership, but for multi-domain operations, technology integration, and cognitive warfare. Warfare is no longer linear. Leadership must be anticipatory, creative, strategic, agile, and intellectually aggressive.

Victory is not guaranteed by budget or technology. It is won by clarity of doctrine, synergy of systems, education of mind, and unity of will.

Conclusion: Sindoor Was Not the End—It Was the Warning

Operation Sindoor was a defining moment—a well-calibrated display of resolve, precision, and tri-service synergy. Yet it also warned us of our soft spots— information delay, overcentralisation, and underdeveloped cyber-influence capabilities. Galwan was our wake-up call; Sindoor was our declaration. The next war—likely shorter, sharper, and fought in many domains—will test our readiness, not just our courage.

The Indian Army, as the backbone of national defence, must now undergo its internal revolution—not just in firepower but in thought, formation, and planning. India's deterrence cannot rest on past glory— instead, itmust rest on future readiness.

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