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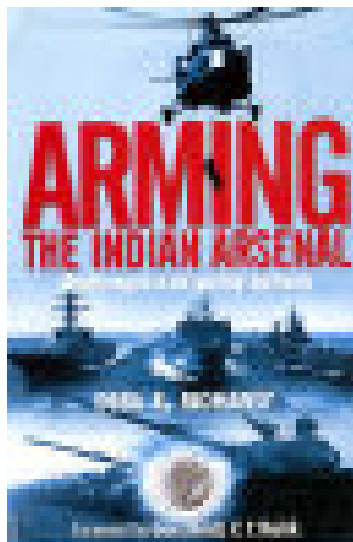
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[Book Review](#)

India's defence procurement dilemmas

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The book attempts to place a perspective on the Indian challenges and options in defence procurement



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India is amongst the top five defence equipment importers in the world. Its main challenge in procuring the necessary equipment is made complex by the security environment in which it is placed. During the Cold War, India remained out of the purview of the most makers of advanced equipment in the West. That was more than compensated by the strategic partnership it developed with the Soviet Union. Moscow had a strategic vision that embraced India as a dependable partner in the larger matrix of U.S.-Soviet confrontation. In every defence-related area, — whether it is buying tanks, aircraft, and submarines, or technology transfers, deferred payments, or building production centres in India, —the Soviets gave India the status of a ‘most favoured nation.’

The collapse of the Soviet Union took away the massive security safety net for India. As India repositioned itself in the emerging international order, globalisation and international economic equations changed the defence industry worldwide. There is

hardly any major tank, aircraft or naval craft today that is produced without international collaboration. What is more, large-scale defence equipment needs have dwindled. This, in turn, has shrunk the defence equipment markets and increased competition.

Compulsions

The defence equipment and technology scenario in the 21st century is marked by compulsions of collaboration amongst producers, laboratories, and governments in a desperate race to keep the defence industries alive. The scales of economy needed to make such industries competitive can only be found through shared R&D, and component production and assembling. All major armaments are manufactured on an international network and sold to individual countries. The Euro-fighter, which is in the race for the multi-billion dollar, 120-plus aircraft Indian market, is a multi-nation product. France's decision to sell the Rafael fighter to the emerging power 'Brazil' is a case in point. After the end of the Mirage production line, French aircraft industry was staring at massive economic closures. Its attempt to supply the Brazilian needs is equally driven by the range of new aircraft coming on line from the U.S., and even China. It is also designed to offset the downturn in the sales of the business jet, Falcon.

For India, the scope for indigenous manufacturing in the prevailing, and foreseeable, global defence production scenario is therefore severely limited. Its choices have so far appropriately been based on licensed production within the country. The challenge here is that defence equipment is hugely obsolescence-prone. India's neighbours modernise their facilities through direct military aid or clandestine transfer of technology. Indian defence forces are thus in a perpetual situation of having to catch up with the neighbours. It is therefore imperative for India to shift gears and get a foothold in the global collaborative defence production enterprise.

Challenges

In this complex scene, the book attempts to place a perspective on the Indian challenges and options. The burden of the book is on inadequate planning, funding, R&D, and private sector participation. In treading this oft-covered ground, even as it captures the new global thrust on collaborative, multi-nation defence production norms of the 21st century, it misses the important dimension of its relevance to India. Indian defence modernisation may have been slow, but it has been systematic and the envy of most comparable countries. No country is free from the burden of modernisation costs and of balancing them with current needs. For India, the key lies not in the philosophy of 'swadeshi', but in joining the international defence manufacturing network, a strategy that will ensure the best in terms of cost and military capabilities alike.