

Analysts Rethink Pakistani, Indian Defense Procurement Methods

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As conflict darkens the skies over South Asia, charges of procurement mismanagement and allegations of large-scale corruption continue to surface in Pakistani and Indian weapons procurement and research and development planning. As the first civilian to have ever worked at the decision-making level in Pakistan's military, I believe the two governments should rationalize military planning and desist from an arms race and military competition. These objectives can be achieved by reviewing their respective defense doctrines and restructuring the armed forces with the goal of right-sizing the militaries. Keeping in view the dire need for socio-economic development, their defense budgets, most of which are absorbed in meeting personnel and maintenance costs, are not sustainable at the current volume.

Unless it is a military regime, the government in Islamabad has no system for authenticating and verifying weapons demands placed by the armed forces that to a great degree are influenced by the arms sellers operating in the country. In fact, there were occasions when military hardware was purchased not because it was needed but because of the personal whims of the chief of a service. Again, I know this from having worked with the Pakistani military on procurement issues.

Nor does it have any system for calculating life-cycle costs of equipment. In the past, this has led to situations when maintenance costs escalated due to foreign arms sanctions and eventually to increased financial wastage. The Navy, the smallest service of the Pakistani armed forces, and where I worked on arms procurement and production issues, was the only service throughout the 1990s to have engaged in major shopping worth over \$2 billion. This was done despite the fact that the service has no significance in broader national military-strategic plans. The previous naval chief, Admiral (Retired) Fasih Bokhari, who tried to tackle the problem of resource wastage in the service through streamlining the procurement system, met resistance both from the political government and his service officials.

All these deals had significant kickbacks attached to them. The procurement of a particular naval reconnaissance aircraft from the United States is a perfect case in point. The P-3C Orions were purchased from the United States when there was no strategic need for these aircraft. To date, there is no naval staff requirement for an aircraft capable of anti-submarine warfare. The plans put together later to fly these aircraft suffered from technological shortfalls leading to the loss of one aircraft and about 17 crew members. The Air Force and the Army suffer from similar situations, which will continue as long as the services refuse to use experts to carry out procurement planning and the whole weapons acquisition process is set on professional lines.

Indigenous production is an expensive activity that does not bear significant strategic dividends. In the ballistic missile and nuclear development programs, for example, neither the performance of developed equipment nor the expenditure is audited or verified by any authority. According to some reports, there were rumors of the Kahuta Research Laboratories not being able to account for the money provided to procure hardware to assemble four to six Ghauri missiles. Reportedly, only 16 missiles were found in the inventory when money was provided for 20.

The military's absolute control of procurement and strategic planning has led to expensive programs and purchases ill afforded by the fledgling economy. The Cabinet Committee for Defense (DCC) and the Defense Council, which are the two main parliamentary bodies for defense decision-making, were never in control of weapons procurement or defense programs.

India, with a stronger civilian control of the military establishment, has not done any better. Professional advice from military personnel is rarely taken into consideration, analysts contend. The purchase of the Russian Su-30 aircraft that cost about \$1.2 billion has recently been put to question. In any case, the Indian Air Force is not reputed to have high maintenance and training standards; since 1996, this has led to the loss of at least 80 aircraft and an equal number of pilots. Considering Tanhem and Cloughly's analysis of the Indian military, New Delhi's armed forces may find it difficult to prove their tactical and technological superiority against their Pakistani rival if a full-fledged conflict were to occur. Some seek comfort in India's nuclear and ballistic missiles capabilities that are completely controlled by its Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO). This organization has consumed huge resources and is involved in a large number of indigenous projects, none of which have been completed successfully.

The light combat aircraft, the indigenous main battle tank and the various categories of ballistic missiles including the Anti-Ballistic Missile system, are all the responsibility of DRDO. The R&D establishment in India is an ambitious organization that has indulged in major indigenous projects without seeking any input from the end user, that is the military. Hence, analysts like Cloughly say major resources are invested without getting the desired output. He and others believe most of the major projects are to boost India's image as an industrially and technologically capable state. Interestingly, all these efforts at image enhancement relate to military projects. Many question whether these systems will even work should a war between the two countries break out. If the United States, which is technologically more advanced and invests more resources on defense R&D, can run into problems with its ABM system it would be ambitious to expect a lot from India's DRDO, they note.

The amount of money and national resources the two countries spend – and waste – on defense is alarming. Researchers and analysts alike believe wastage in the defense sector can be reduced through making the procurement policymaking system more expert-oriented and by increasing communication between the various communities that are involved in the process. Wasted resources impact negatively in two ways: (a) they don't render the desired dividends and (b) they lead to more expenditure because the military, unable to meet its technological demands, then requests additional money to meet technological shortfalls. Analysts believe the Indian Army's request for the purchase of Russian T-90 tanks is a case in point: the indigenous MBT couldn't meet its requirements so the military put in a request for Russian equipment. Seen from the standpoint of other sectors deprived of resources, the impact of military systems out of control as in Pakistan and India becomes phenomenal.

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