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A security architecture without the mortar

Why in news:-

- Recently government set up a **Defence Planning Committee (DPC)** *to assist in the creation of “national security strategy, international defence engagement strategy, roadmap to build*
 - defence manufacturing ecosystem, strategy to boost defence exports, and
 - priority capability development plans”.
- And government also decided to revive the **Strategic Policy Group (SPG)** within the overall National Security Council (NSC) system.
- There are apprehensions that how these (SPG and DPC) committees will take care of the *fundamental problems in the country’s security architecture.*

State of India’s Security Environment:-

- India’s national security environment has steadily deteriorated since 2014.
- **Pakistan Fronts:** Both the overall *violence in Jammu and Kashmir* and *ceasefire violations on the Line of Control* reached ***a 14-year high in 2017, a trend that refuses to subside in 2018.***
 - India’s response as surgical strikes hardly made any significant gains

- **Chinese Fronts:** The pressure from China is on the rise.
 - Though there is a peace on *Doklam stand-off* but there is *report of the the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs*, which claims that the Chinese forces are back in the Doklam plateau with more force.
 - The report goes on to fault the government for *“continuing with its conventionally deferential foreign policy towards China”*.
 - There is increase of *China’s footprint in India’s Neighbour and Indian Ocean* as seen in Maldives and Nepals relation.

Issues in Security Architecture:-

- **Frenzied Foreign Policy Activities Due to lack of vision:** New Delhi’s neighbourhood policy continues to be in the *doldrums* and there is *a clear absence of vision* on how to balance, engage and work with the many great powers in the regional and the broader international scene.
- **Serious Concerns about the level of our Defence Preparedness:**
 - There are many reports that India might be *ill-equipped to fight the wars of modern age*.
 - India’s defence policy is *on auto-pilot with hardly any political oversight or vision*.
 - There is little conversation between the armed forces and the political class, and even lesser conversation among the various arms of the forces.

- **Absence of jointness in the Indian armed force:** Our doctrines, command structures, force deployments and defence acquisition continue as though each arm is going to fight a future war on its own. Various arms of the Indian armed forces plan their strategies in silos.
- This will soon become unsustainable for a country that aspires to be a modern great power.
- **Undierutilization of various national security Institution :**
 - The **NSC**, which replicates the membership of the Cabinet Committee on Security, almost never meets.
 - Key post of military adviser in the **National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS)** remains vacant.
 - **National Security Advisory Board**, initially set up by the Vajpayee government, to seek 'outside expertise' on strategic matters, is today a space for retired officials.
 - In India, talk of appointing a **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** has all but died down.
 - As a result, there is *little fresh thinking within the government or perspective planning on the country's national security or defence.*
- **Little developement on the recommedation of defence reform committee :** Various defence committee recommendation are mostly unimplemented be it as new as **DB Shekatkar defence reform Committee**, or old as **Kargil review committee** under chairmanship of **K Subramanyan**.

Assessment of SPG and DPC :-

➤ Positive:

- These committees would take a close, hard look at the state of modernisation and domestic defence industry in the country, both of which are in a sorry state.
- Though under the present system, where the ratio of revenue to capital expenditure in defence is roughly 65:35%, in short term any serious attempt at modernisation would not work, but in long term there is hope.
- Provide a little more coordination in decision making.

➤ Negative:

- Too Much on NSA's Plate : To expect the NSA to chair all these committees and then action their recommendations while at the same time running the country's national security affairs on a day-to-day basis is unrealistic, and would end up producing sub-optimal outcomes.
- All that the SPG and DPC would achieve is to further bureaucratise the national security decision making and centralise all national security powers under the PMO.

Suggestion :-

- There should be more priority on solving fundamental problem in security architecture.

- There should be “jointmanship” within the forces which create synergy and optimum utilisation of resources.
- Lacuna’s in defence management should be addressed as suggested by Defence Reform Committee.

Way Ahead:-

- At the end of the day, many of India’s national security inadequacies stem from the absence of **a national security/defence vision.**
- Ideally, the country should have **an overall national security document** from which the various agencies and the arms of the armed forces draw their mandate and create their own respective and joint doctrines which would then translate into operational doctrines for tactical engagement.
- In the absence of this, as is the case in India today, national strategy is broadly a function of ad hocism and personal preferences.

THANK YOU

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