



Doubt everything. Find your own light
~ Buddha



Making Defence self-reliant

The Indian Air Force Chief's declaration that the IAF is targeting to have its entire inventory produced in India by 2047 marks a major milestone in the country's defence strategy. As India moves towards its 100th year of independence, this bold commitment to self-reliance in defence production sends a clear message of confidence and preparedness in facing future security challenges. India has long grappled with threats at its borders, particularly with China rapidly building infrastructure along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), especially in sensitive regions like Ladakh. Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh's acknowledgment of this infrastructural race underscores the importance of an equally rapid evolution in India's defence capabilities. Relying on foreign suppliers for critical defence equipment can be a vulnerability, and the IAF's plan to indigenize its arsenal reflects a broader strategy to mitigate this risk. The initiative to produce a completely indigenous defence inventory by 2047 aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India). It is a clear response to geopolitical realities, recognizing that India's ability to defend itself must not be dependent on the whims or crises faced by external suppliers. By developing indigenous weapons systems, India will strengthen its national security while also fuelling innovation and economic growth in the defence sector. The IAF chief's comments highlight the necessity of home-grown defence systems, especially in light of evolving global threats and uncertainties. We have witnessed rising tensions not only with immediate neighbours but also in broader geographies like Europe and the Indo-Pacific, where conflicts and power rivalries persist. By shifting towards indigenous production, India secures itself from external embargoes, delays, or shortages that often come with over-reliance on foreign suppliers during times of conflict or crisis. It is also noteworthy that the IAF is making strides towards advanced capabilities, as evidenced by the delivery of three units of the S-400 missile systems from Russia, with the remaining two expected by next year. While foreign procurement will continue to play a vital role in the interim, the shift towards local production will not only fortify India's defence forces but also ensure better control over the quality and maintenance of the equipment. Moreover, this transition is expected to have a tremendous economic impact, leading to job creation and the growth of India's industrial base. Indigenous production in defence will boost the Make in India initiative, allowing Indian companies, both public and private, to contribute to advanced technological development and innovation. In time, India may even become an exporter of defence technology, contributing to regional and global stability. The challenges ahead, however, are not insignificant. India will need to foster robust public-private partnerships, invest in research and development, and ensure that its defence manufacturers meet the high standards required for advanced weapons systems. Continuous modernization and innovation will be essential to stay ahead of evolving threats. Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh's assertion that the IAF aims to have a fully indigenous inventory by 2047 is a commendable and strategic vision. It is a significant step towards strengthening India's self-reliance, bolstering its defence preparedness, and ensuring that the country remains secure in an increasingly uncertain world. The push for indigenous weapons systems will not only enhance India's defence capabilities but also contribute to the nation's technological and industrial development in the decades to come.

The War in Ukraine

INDIA, THE PEACE-BROKER?

■ PROF (DR) D K GIRI

The External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar reveals that India is talking to both Ukraine and Russia for a resolution of the conflict and ending the ongoing war. Does this mean that New Delhi is actively playing the role of a peace-broker? It has been long expected of India to give a hand or take the lead in resolving the conflict in Ukraine. This expectation from India stems from India's foreign policy tradition of neutrality which was called non-alignment and New Delhi's perceived friendship with Russia; the historical relation with former Soviet Union providing the backdrop.

The recent activism of India's foreign policy machinery, especially the movement of Prime Minister indicates the possibility of New Delhi getting involved in Ukrainian conflict. Prime Minister has been meeting Russian President Putin, took a bus ride from Warsaw to Kyiv to meet President Zelenskyy. Although his meeting with Zelenskyy did not yield much optimism, as was evident from Zelenskyy's statements, Modi met the Ukrainian President again on the fringe of Quad and UN meetings. Jaishankar's occasional statements hinting at India's role in peace-making lends credibility to the perception of India's involvement.

No doubt that if India succeeds in bringing an end to the bloody and horrific war in Ukraine, it will signal a precedent for preventing and ending wars elsewhere. The escalation of wars in the Middle-East is a hair-raising scenario for the entire world. So, it is in order that we assess New Delhi's chances and ability in brokering peace between Ukraine and Russia. India has maintained that the conflict should be resolved through diplomacy and negotiations. Jaishankar has been reiterating that the solution to the conflict lies at the negotiating table, not on the battleground. Such an approach is gaining currency among the stakeholders. This is a start for India.

The second variable going for India is that it has a non-partisan image, has good relations with both sides of the conflict. This edifies India as a possible mediator. What are possible terms for negotiation? What would be a just peace acceptable to both sides? Ukraine will expect that final settlement of this war should uphold the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty of independent states. That is also the normative position in lines with the Charter of United Nations. The India-Poland Strategic Partnership Declaration underlined the call for 'just' peace. President Zelenskyy, however, would expect the peace negotiations to be based on his 10-point plan.

To fully agree to Zelenskyy's plan would mean that Russia is brought to the negotiating table from a position of defeat or imminent collapse of his defence. Many observers would argue that this is not realistic. The option is to accept Russia's terms. The implication of this option is that Ukraine compromises its sovereignty, complicates its reconstruction and risks its existence. Ukraine's western allies will expect that Rus-

sia will not resume its war against Ukraine nor invade any other member of the European Union or NATO. Remember that the Western allies have promised 50 billion dollars more as an aid to Ukraine. It appears they are in no mood to just let Russia run away with victory in Ukraine.

A Russian outright victory will have serious implications for the West, India and the world. One, it will send a message that a big power can openly violate the sovereignty of a smaller country, mainly its neighbour, seize its territory on one pretext or the other

across the world about the US as a solid partner. In the Indo-Pacific, it may encourage China to be more aggressive. If this scenario is bad enough, what is the other optimistic outcome? Can Ukraine win? It is not impossible. Russia is not invincible. History shows that Moscow has been conquered by the Poles in 1612. The Bolshevik Russian Army was defeated by Poland at the battle of Vistula in 1920. Russia lost a war with Japan in 1905 and to Afghanistan in 1989. So, it is not difficult to defeat Russia with great courage and

economy. It is also costing the US far less in blood and treasure than its 20 year engagement in Afghanistan.

Notwithstanding the possible scenarios in ending the war and implications of its continuation, India should strive to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table. Organising peace conferences like the one done in Switzerland, will not serve the purpose as it isolates Russia. Any negotiation to be successful, all the immediate stakeholders have to be around the table, certainly Russians and

To fully agree to Zelenskyy's plan would mean that Russia is brought to the negotiating table from a position of defeat or imminent collapse of his defence. Many observers would argue that this is not realistic. The option is to accept Russia's terms. The implication of this option is that Ukraine compromises its sovereignty, complicates its reconstruction and risks its existence. Ukraine's western allies will expect that Russia will not resume its war against Ukraine nor invade any other member of the European Union or NATO. Remember that the Western allies have promised 50 billion dollars more as an aid to Ukraine. It appears they are in no mood to just let Russia run away with victory in Ukraine. A Russian outright victory will have serious implications for the West, India and the world. One, it will send a message that a big power can openly violate the sovereignty of a smaller country, mainly its neighbour, seize its territory on one pretext or the other and escape with impunity. Such an act would encourage other countries to do the same in complete violation of international norms which India has been advocating. Second, Russian victory on the battlefield as well as at the negotiating table will strain its relationship with the West, pushing it closer to the arms of China. In trade and commercial terms, without a market in Europe, Russia will become deeply dependent on China. This will go against India's strategic interest. New Delhi wants a fissure in Sino-Russian alliance. But is likely? New Delhi has to perhaps reconcile to a long-term Sino-Russian partnership except that it is not directed against India's interest.



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Third, Russian victory would undermine the US credibility as a security provider. It would cast an ominous shadow of doubt

strong will to fight which the Ukrainians have displayed. They also have the continued support both economic and military from the powerful Western allies.

There is a widespread belief in India and elsewhere that a possible change of leadership in United States after the November elections, the American support to Ukraine might deplete. In that case, Ukraine may not be able to hold much longer against Russia. This is a misconception. The change of leadership in US not resulting in abandoning Ukraine not because Donald Trump has been well-disposed to Putin, but America has deep strategic and security interests in Ukraine. The United States will not like to hand over the victory to the main ally of China which is its principal adversary. The war in Ukraine is helping somewhat the US

Ukrainians. If New Delhi makes that meeting happen, it would have paved the way for a negotiated settlement of the two-and-half year old war. It is time Prime Minister Modi proves that this is not an era of wars. Given his determination and strength of conviction, he could walk his talk. India's success even partial in bringing a ceasefire in Ukraine leading to a permanent solution would be a great signal to the world vis-a-vis wars raging in many parts of the world. India's message should be, 'give dialogue a chance' and 'embrace peace not war'. The former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has endorsed this in an article in an Indian newspaper while paying his tribute to the apostle of peace Mahatma Gandhi on his birth anniversary on 2 October. It is time to make the world recognise that this message is critical to survival of humanity. ---INFA

RULING THE OCEAN

■ ADITI SINGH

The current global order is undoubtedly facing a crisis, as geopolitical dynamics have experienced substantial transformations over the past few decades. Traditionally, the dichotomy between East and West, or North and South, has largely shaped international relations, with affluent and impoverished nations distinctly separated by their ideologies, economic capabilities, and resource availability. However, this conventional world order began to undergo significant changes towards the conclusion of the 20th century, blurring the previously defined boundaries between these global factions.

Presently, the international landscape is characterized not by clashing ideologies, but by economic and political manoeuvres aimed at enhancing power and influence. The latter part of the 20th century, along with the initial two decades of the 21st century, has witnessed notable shifts in global economic and political authority. The conclusion of the Cold War ushered in a unipolar world led by the United States; however, signs of weakening in this dominance became evident, particularly following the 2008 financial crisis, which severely undermined confidence in market-oriented economies.

The financial turmoil experienced worldwide revealed the vulnerabilities of previously reliable economic frameworks. Concurrently, international relations have become increasingly strained, exacerbated by recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022), the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and the resurgence of vi-

olence in the Israel-Hamas conflict. These developments have returned the global economy to a state of tension and instability. This persistent instability indicates a transition from a unipolar system towards either a bipolar or tripolar arrangement, and potentially towards a multipolar future.

As emerging powers gain prominence and established alliances evolve, nations are compelled to reevaluate their resources and strategic positions. Among the most vital of these resources are those associated with maritime domains, particularly the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), which grant nations significant authority over marine resources. Human activities, driven by rapid advancements in technology, have increasingly concentrated on the maritime sector, which serves not only the purposes of international trade but also plays a crucial role in enhancing security and ensuring unrestricted access to international waters.

The oceans hold paramount significance, as they provide a vast array of resources that are essential for sustaining global commerce, meeting energy requirements, and securing food supplies. Recognizing this reality, various international conventions and agreements have been established to create standardized norms for maritime operations, with the overarching objective of maintaining peaceful seas and fostering cooperation among nations. A notable illustration of this trend is the practice of registering vessels under flags that differ from their countries of ownership, a phenomenon now adopted by over 60 percent of the world's shipping fleet.

This practice, often referred to as "flag of convenience," underscores the interconnectedness of contemporary trade and economic systems, as it

allows ship owners to benefit from more favourable regulations and lower operational costs. Furthermore, with 85 percent of the world's nations possessing coastlines and nearly 40 percent of the global population residing within 100 nautical miles of the ocean, the significance of the maritime domain for both individual countries and global trade becomes increasingly evident. The strategic importance of coastlines is further highlighted by the fact that many of the world's principal capitals and economic hubs are situated along these coastal areas, facilitating trade and commerce.

Moreover, 36 percent of the ocean's expanse is encompassed within the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of various nations, which grants them special rights to explore and exploit marine resources. This allocation of maritime territory is crucial for national economies, as it allows countries to harness the wealth of the oceans while also asserting their sovereignty over these vital areas. Importantly, 97 percent of global trade transpires via maritime routes, emphasizing the pre-eminence of maritime commerce in shaping international relations and economic interdependence.

The oceans present substantial economic prospects, offering extensive areas for investment, development, and growth. Countries around the world are increasingly recognizing the potential of their maritime resources, with nations like India relying heavily on these resources for their economic well-being. In light of this, the imperative for India to cultivate a strong national maritime awareness has never been more pressing. Positioned strategically as a maritime power, India boasts a coastline exceeding 7,500 kilome-

ters and an EEZ that spans an impressive 2.37 million square kilometers.

This vast maritime territory not only provides India with access to rich marine resources but also positions the country as a key player in regional and global maritime affairs. India's future as a key global economic and political player hinges on its ability to utilize maritime resources. The rise of deep-sea mining, driven by technological advancements, offers opportunities for extracting hydrocarbons, natural gas, and rare earth metals. With 95% of India's trade by volume and 77% by value conducted via maritime routes, the nation relies heavily on maritime commerce for economic growth.

To harness this potential, India must focus on enhancing sectors like fishing, shipbuilding, port development, coastal tourism, and blue energy. Despite advantages in labor costs and technology, India currently holds only 1% of global shipbuilding and over 60% of its cargo is transported on foreign vessels, highlighting the need to strengthen domestic shipping capabilities.

The Sagarmala project aims to modernize ports and coastal infrastructure with a projected investment of USD 1.42 trillion by 2035, transforming India's coastline through special economic zones, inland waterways, and coastal tourism. Additionally, India's maritime development will enhance its role as a responsible global actor, capable of providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), established by the Indian Navy in 2008, has fostered regional naval collaboration, positioning India as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean.

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