

**"Citizens have the right to hold their political leaders and governing institutions accountable. It is unacceptable to assert that questioning the armed forces or government is unpatriotic."**

In the wake of Pulwama and Balakot, national security may become the key issue in the forthcoming general elections. A focus on national security is assumed to bring advantage to the ruling BJP as it could sweep aside the Opposition's efforts to leverage the failures of the government on generating employment and relieving farm distress. It would be most timely if national security indeed became a serious election issue, not in terms of scoring political points, but in drawing attention to persistent infirmities in our governance systems, the failure to address serious gaps identified by expert committees such as the Kargil Review Committee (2000) and the Naresh Chandra Task Force on National Security (2012) and the blatant lack of accountability apparent in avoiding public reckoning in subsequent serious security lapses evident in the Pathankot, Uri and now the Pulwama incidents.

Let each political party in the fray have the courage to acknowledge India's national security challenge in its various dimensions and include in their respective manifestos what practical steps they are committed to undertaking to make our country safe from external and domestic threats.

One must expose our hostile neighbour's responsibility for threats to our national security. But it is as important to turn the spotlight on our own failings which allow our adversaries to exploit them repeatedly. The surgical strikes in 2016 and now the air attacks on Balakot are significant actions in raising the costs for Pakistan pursuing cross-border terror against India. But let us not over-interpret their impact. Any triumphalism which deflects attention from what needs to be done to strengthen our national security structures and processes, must be avoided. No government, no political leader, no institution of the state should claim immunity from scrutiny or questioning, especially in a democracy. As we go into the elections, political parties need to engage in a substantive debate on national security issues, share with the public what they believe are the serious gaps which must be addressed and what each intends to do to overcome them. What are the critical issues on which political parties should seek the people's mandate?

Recognising that national security has become a major public preoccupation, each party should include in its manifesto what it believes should be the national security doctrine for a plural and democratic country like India. It should be a doctrine based not on creating fear but clearly spelling out the real trade-off between security and the space to enjoy democratic values and fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. A national security doctrine will make sense only if it is placed in the framework of India's Constitution and conveys a sense of where India wishes to be as a country and society in 10, 20 or 30 years. We should not end up as a state where security compulsions become a veto over decisions of democratically elected governments, nor should an elected government use the national security argument to abridge the rights of citizens and resist their right to hold government accountable.

More specifically, political parties should commit to updating the reports of the Kargil Review Committee and the Naresh Chandra Task Force on National Security, make public their outcome and promote an open debate as a prelude to implementing key recommendations. These two reports not only contain a diagnosis of our national security challenge but valuable recommendations to address it. They emphasise the need to draw lessons from past successes and failures and avoid ad hoc responses.

There are some indispensable elements for a robust national security system. One relates to police reform. Any security system is as good and efficient as its junior-most footsoldier. The best superstructure is like a house built on sand unless it is supported by highly trained and motivated personnel at the lowest rungs of hierarchy. In India, law and order is a state subject. The recruitment of police personnel at these levels is often subject to political patronage and corrupt practices. They lack basic training. Some, being virtually illiterate, are not even trainable. Their conditions of work and living are pathetic. They are easily corrupted. Most state governments are guilty of allowing large vacancies in their police forces.

India has one of the lowest police to population ratios at 125 per 1,00,000. At the ground level, there is virtually no policing of the kind which might have apprehended the LeT terrorists as they landed on the beach outside Mumbai. That there is regular smuggling from across the sea and our land borders is an open secret. Terrorists slip through using these smuggling routes often relying upon corrupted elements in security forces. No additional bureaucratic layers added to an already top heavy system are likely to make much difference unless the reality at the local level is addressed. Are the political parties ready to commit to implementing the long awaited, indeed Supreme Court directed, police reforms?

There is inordinate stress on the personal security of political personages and senior officials at the expense of public security. There are three security personnel, on an average, for every VIP. Some political leaders are protected by as many as a hundred or more security guards at the state's expense. This is anachronistic in a democratic and egalitarian society, but also impacts adversely on the state's ability to ensure public security and law and order without which terrorist threats cannot be addressed. Is any political party ready to declare that it will not seek privileged security cover for its members but focus instead on improving public security?

These are some of the real issues relating to national security and can be addressed through efficient and accountable institutions and not through individual bravery or brilliance. Citizens have the right to hold their political leaders and governing institutions accountable and that is only possible if there is transparency mandated by law, not left to the discretion of a government. It is unacceptable to assert that questioning the armed forces or government is unpatriotic. Armed forces are not invincible. They can make mistakes, they may lack capacity or the right kind of weaponry and equipment. National security does not justify hiding from one's own citizens the infirmities which plague our security forces. Governments make mistakes and will continue making them if citizens cannot question them. Are our parties ready to commit themselves to comprehensively evaluating national security institutions and processes through credible and respected public figures and independent professionals?

Let us, by all means, make national security an election issue because there are serious concerns on how it is being handled. Treating it as an evanescent electoral ploy rather than as an existential matter is selling the country short.

# GS World Team...

## Combat Casualty Drugs

### Why in the discussion?

- Recently, 'Combat Casualty Drugs' have been developed by the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO)'s medical laboratory.
- These medicines will be able to increase the extremely delicate time period of the injured soldiers before being transported to the hospital.
- It has been stated by DRDO that the purpose of these drugs is to provide the right treatment to the seriously injured in the Pulawama attack or in the war-like situation by saving the lives of the soldiers and reducing the number of death.
- The benefits of these medicines will be that they can be given the necessary treatment in the important time to save the lives of injured personnel.
- Usually, before reaching the hospital, seriously injured soldiers die due to lack of treatment.

### What is it?

- These drugs made by scientists of DRDO include bleeding wounds, absorbent dressing and glycerated saline.

- All these things can save life in the jungle, extreme high-altitude areas and in the event of terrorist attacks.

### Benefit

- Scientists believe that these medicines can reduce the number of death.
- According to scientists preparing medicines in the DRDO's laboratory institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences, if the injured gets effective primary treatment after being injured and transported to the hospital, then the chances of survival becomes high.
- Indigenous manufactured drugs of DRDO can prove to be a boon in the times of war for paramilitary forces and defense personnel.
- These medicines will ensure that our brave soldiers do not suffer from unmounted blood loss while being taken to a better healthcare from war zones.
- In most cases, only a medical worker and limited equipment are used to take care of soldiers during the war, so these drugs will prove to be extremely beneficial.

### Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

#### 1. Consider the following statements-

1. Law and order in India is a state subject.
2. The ratio of population and police personnel in India is the lowest in the world.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1                      (b) Only 2  
(c) Both 1 and 2              (d) Neither 1 nor 2

### Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

1. What steps should be taken to tackle the challenges emanating regarding national security? Evaluate in the context of Pulwama attack. **(250 Words)**

**Note:** Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 14 Mar. is 1(c)