# Delhi Policy Group
## Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

# POLICY BRIEF

## Defence Forces Vision 2047: Aspirations and Challenges

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Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

## Cover Images:

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, along with Service Chiefs, releasing the Defence Forces Vision 2047, in New Delhi on March 10, 2026. Source: PIB

The Indian Navy successfully test-firing an extended-range land attack Brahmos supersonic cruise missile from the stealth destroyer INS Chennai, on March 5, 2022. Source: PIB

The High-Altitude Warfare School of Indian Army conducted a two-week course for members of the Kyrgyzstan Armed Forces in January 2026. Source: X/@adgpi

# DEFENCE FORCES VISION 2047: ASPIRATIONS AND CHALLENGES

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## I. Introduction

On March 10, 2026, India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh released the "Defence Forces Vision 2047: A Roadmap for a Future-Ready Indian Military."[1] Vision 2047 is an attempt to link India's long-term national ambitions with the future role and capabilities of its armed forces. By setting the centenary year of independence as its horizon, the document tries to move beyond incremental modernisation towards a more ambitious conception of military transformation.

This is significant because India's military environment is changing in ways that make traditional approaches to capability development increasingly insufficient. The country continues to face persistent conventional threats, even as the character of warfare is being reshaped by technological disruption, grey-zone coercion, and the growing importance of information and cognition as domains of contestation. The military that India will require over the next two decades cannot simply be a better-equipped version of the force it has today.

The document frames military transformation as part of India's broader national rise and argues that this requires an integrated all-domain force capable of operating across the full spectrum of conflict. It links the future of the armed forces to the broader relationship between Viksit Bharat (Developed India) and Sashakt Bharat (Empowered India), suggesting that India's development and its security cannot be separated. Integration of military strength with diplomatic, economic and technological power will create a cohesive and robust national security framework.

Accordingly, Vision 2047 seeks to create an "integrated all-domain force, dynamic and self-reliant in thought and capabilities, ready to respond across the full spectrum of conflict, to protect and promote national interests, in concert with all elements of national power." The document makes it clear that Atmanirbharta (self-reliance) must extend to thought, doctrines, concepts, tactics and capabilities. The message is that India's future military effectiveness cannot rest on importing platforms alone, but on building indigenous strategic competence.

This policy brief assesses the vision's core proposals, identifies implementation challenges that could determine its success, and sets out a framework of near-term benchmarks to track progress up to 2030.

## II. Vision 2047: Core Proposals

## Operational Environment

The document's exploration of the threat environment sets the analytical foundation for military reform. India's security threats range from sub-conventional conflict and proxy war to conventional confrontation and even the possibility of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) contingencies. It also points to broader challenges emanating from India's regional environment, including terrorism, transnational trafficking, illegal migration, maritime insecurity and instability generated by neighbouring adversaries and non-state actors.

The result is a picture of a security environment defined not by episodic crises alone, but by continuous competition across multiple levels of intensity. Future conflict will not necessarily unfold through clear declarations of war. Instead, states may rely on ambiguity, deniability, and coercion below the threshold of armed conflict to shape the environment to their advantage.

Maritime security is presented as central to India's economic well-being and freedom of action, with threats ranging from piracy and maritime terrorism to illegal trafficking and challenges to sea access. Cyber is treated as a core domain of both offence and defence, especially in a context where the economy and state systems are increasingly digitised. Space is described as congested, commercial, competitive and contested, with direct implications for both development and warfighting. There is also recognition of cognitive warfare, where the human mind becomes a battlefield, and disinformation, psychological operations, and the manipulation of social fault lines become tools of strategic effect.

Emerging technologies are changing the concept of force application during combat. The document notes that warfare is moving from network-centric to data-centric and eventually intelligence-centric forms, driven by artificial intelligence, robotics, unmanned and autonomous systems, advanced data analytics, and transparency on the battlefield. Future war strategies will rely on seamless integration of networks, secure communications and superiority in data management.

The document's core proposals flow from this assessment. It states that the expansion of threats necessitates that the Indian Defence Forces be capable of operating in all domains and across the full spectrum of conflict. Synergised use of force will require a high level of tri-service integration. With the pace of advances in warfighting techniques and technologies, a dynamic, adaptive, and agile defence force will be better positioned and structured for victory.

## Strategic Priorities

The seven strategic priorities laid out in the document provide the direction for achieving Vision 2047. These priorities cover combat readiness and responsiveness; organisational agility and interoperability; capability development and sustenance; doctrinal, conceptual and technological adaptation; strategic culture and climate; training, education and empowerment; and military cooperation and defence diplomacy. Taken together, they show an attempt to comprehensively address the military as an institution.

On combat readiness, the document calls for a National Military Strategy and Theatre Strategies, stronger deterrence through intelligent platforms, improved border infrastructure, cyber resilience, and space-based capabilities. On organisational reform, it emphasises integrated networks, tri-service logistics, integrated maintenance systems, a Joint Headquarters and a Joint Operations Coordination Centre. In an oblique reference to Integrated Theatre Commands, it recommends separating force generation from force application by establishing integrated structures for operational command and control.

The most specific proposals lie in the capability development section. The document proposes an Integrated Capability Development Plan, faster acquisition processes, dual-use infrastructure and surge capacities for prolonged attritional conflict. It recommends the creation of a Defence Geo-Spatial Agency, a Data Force, a Drone Force and a Cognitive Warfare Action Force, along with a Space Command and a Cyber Command. It also seeks stronger missile and air defence capabilities as part of Mission Sudarshan Chakra. These proposals are significant because they move beyond platform-centric thinking towards new organisational structures suited to the emerging domains of warfare.

The document also recognises that military transformation depends on doctrine, institutions, education, skills and strategic culture. It calls for a contemporary doctrine to lay the foundation for multi-domain operations and to incorporate cognitive warfare into conventional operations. This insight matters because technology adoption without doctrinal adaptation yields limited gains.

Vision 2047 seeks to cultivate a strategic culture more closely aligned with Indian conditions and national requirements. It proposes expanding the Future Warfare Cell into a Future Operations Analysis Group, establishing the Indian Defence University as a centre of excellence for leadership and critical thinking, and building a technologically adept and mentally agile force. The emphasis on digital training systems, common standards and skill development suggests a recognition that the military's future edge will depend heavily on its ability to learn, adapt and think.

Military cooperation and defence diplomacy are treated as instruments of India's wider strategy. The document highlights military-to-military engagement with friendly countries, interoperability, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping and other forms of international cooperation. This framing presents the armed forces not only as warfighting institutions but as active instruments of India's regional and international influence.

The reforms are to be implemented through a three-phase roadmap. The first phase, up to 2030, is an 'Era of Transition' focused on organisational restructuring, tighter control of borders, air, and maritime spaces, and creation of indigenous capacities. The second phase, from 2030 to 2040, is an 'Era of Consolidation' in which deeper integration, data-centric operations and the fuller incorporation of cyber and space capabilities are expected to take shape. The final phase, from 2040 to 2047, is the 'Era of Excellence' in which India's armed forces emerge as a world-class military.

## III. Implementation Challenges

The ultimate test of Defence Forces Vision 2047 is not whether it offers a persuasive diagnosis of a future force, but whether India can overcome the institutional, doctrinal, and industrial difficulties that stand between strategic ambition and military transformation. The challenge lies in execution rather than conception. The vision itself implicitly acknowledges this by describing many of its goals as aspirational and subject to approval at multiple levels of government. Achieving these goals will require a whole-of-nation approach.

### Political Ownership

Political and institutional ownership is the first and most foundational challenge. A wide-ranging reform in the Indian Defence Forces cannot be driven internally by the military itself. Nor can it be left to evolve through incremental adaptation. A roadmap of this scale needs explicit political sponsorship and a monitored implementation framework.

A comprehensive transformation will require an implementing authority, a reform calendar, a process for inter-ministerial coordination and a mechanism for periodic review. Without that, responsibility will be diffused across the services, the Department of Military Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Finance, the public-sector defence establishment, and the private industry.

The immediate policy requirement, therefore, is to translate the vision into a government-backed programme with clearly defined ownership. Without that, the first risk is not failure in 2047 but a drift in the coming years. The experience of the

long-delayed Indian Defence University is a reminder that even relatively straightforward institutional reforms can remain stalled for years if political backing and administrative follow-through are weak.

## Jointness and Organisational Reforms

The second challenge is that the integrated force envisaged in the document cannot emerge without structural reforms in operational command-and-control arrangements, joint planning, and integrated logistics. A future-ready military requires shared situational awareness, common planning processes, interoperable communications, and faster decision cycles. The document's emphasis on integrated networks, Joint Logistic Nodes and a Joint Operations Coordination Centre should be part of the larger move towards a military capable of conducting integrated multi-domain operations.

Yet, jointness is one of the most difficult reforms to realise in practice. It requires each service to accept changes in institutional roles, authority, resource allocation and operational control. The ongoing debate over Integrated Theatre Commands illustrates that the three services hold divergent views on how operational integration should be achieved. Until that debate is resolved through political decision rather than inter-service negotiation, the joint structures envisaged in Vision 2047 will remain incomplete or poorly designed.

## Capability Development and Industrial Delivery

The third challenge is whether India's procurement system, defence industrial base, and Atmanirbharta can deliver the required capabilities at the necessary speed and scale.

India's defence acquisition system has often struggled to do this, especially in emerging technologies that evolve far faster than conventional procurement timelines. If acquisition processes remain slow and fragmented, the risk is that some vital capability gaps will remain unaddressed.

This challenge is not merely procedural, but also industrial. Atmanirbharta is strategically necessary, particularly in an era of supply-chain vulnerability and technological denial. However, self-reliance must be measured by capability output rather than by the rhetoric of indigenisation alone. If indigenous systems do not arrive on time, do not meet operational requirements, or are unable to scale, the armed forces will face readiness shortfalls. The clearest reminder is the Tejas Mk1A programme. Contracted deliveries have been subject to prolonged delays driven by industrial

capacity constraints and supply-chain bottlenecks, leaving the Indian Air Force short of the replacements it had planned for.

The right policy approach is therefore twofold. First, procurement reform should be treated as a top priority. Faster approvals, clearer prioritisation, and stronger integration among users, developers, and manufacturers are essential. Second, areas where indigenous solutions can be accelerated should receive institutional and financial backing, while genuinely urgent capability gaps should not be left unaddressed in the name of self-reliance.

## Doctrine, Human Capital and Institutional Learning

The fourth challenge is that technological and organisational change will have limited effect unless it is matched by doctrinal adaptation, specialist training and stronger institutions for military learning. This is one of the document's most important insights. It repeatedly stresses that future battlefields will demand contemporary doctrine, multi-domain thinking, cognitive resilience and a shift from information superiority to decision superiority. That recognition matters because military institutions characteristically absorb new hardware faster than they absorb new concepts of operation.

India has yet to see a significant shift in doctrinal thinking or training commensurate with the vision's ambitions. A Data Force will matter only if the military can organise, protect, fuse and exploit data in ways that improve operational decision-making. There must be conceptual clarity on how cognitive warfare is to be integrated with kinetic operations. In joint training, the three services are only beginning to exercise together in areas such as CBRN, intelligence, law and music. These are peripheral areas, and much more needs to be done to build a solid foundation for multi-domain competence.

## IV. Measuring Success: A Framework for Transition to 2030

A vision stretching to 2047 could look too distant unless it is anchored to commitments that create institutional momentum. The most important policy task is therefore to define near-term priorities, measurable milestones and a realistic sequence of reform.

The transition period up to 2030 should be treated as the decisive implementation window. It is the phase in which the foundational structures, processes and capabilities should take shape. If this phase falters, the consolidation and excellence phases that follow will be built on a fragile base.

Table 1 sets out a suggested practical framework for assessing whether implementation is on track during the transition phase. The table is organised around

five reform areas, but these are not exhaustive and serve only as examples. Similarly, the 2030 benchmarks would be in greater detail than listed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Framework for Assessing Progress of Implementation under Vision 2047 (Transition Phase to 2030)**

| Reform Area | Key 2030 Benchmarks | Status (for periodic review) |
|---|---|---|
| **Force Integration** | 1. Integrated ISR networks operational across services.<br>2. Joint Operations Coordination Centre established and functional.<br>3. Integrated structures for operational command and control (Integrated Theatre Commands) raised.<br>4. Tri-service logistics integration framework adopted. | |
| **Capability Development** | 1. Revised acquisition process with faster approval timelines notified.<br>2. Drone Force and counter-drone capability operationalised.<br>3. Space-based ISR capability expanded; Space Command raised.<br>4. Self-healing cyber defence framework deployed; Cyber Command raised.<br>5. Mission Sudarshan Chakra: integrated missile and air defence capability targets met. | |
| **Operational Preparedness** | 1. Tri-service War Wastage Reserve strategy approved and in implementation.<br>2. Standardised CBRN equipment procurement underway across all three services.<br>3. Priority border infrastructure projects completed on schedule.<br>4. Air and underwater domain awareness operationalised in specified priority sectors. | |
| **New Organisational Structures** | 1. Defence Geo-Spatial Agency raised and operational. | |

| Reform Area | Key 2030 Benchmarks | Status (for periodic review) |
|---|---|---|
| | 2. Data Force established with clear mandate and resourcing. <br> 3. Cognitive Warfare Action Force constituted with defined roles. <br> 4. Integrated Capability Development Plan notified and linked to acquisition cycles. | |
| **Doctrine and Human Capital** | 1. Indian Defence University established with first intake admitted. <br> 2. National Military Strategy and Theatre Strategies issued and promulgated. <br> 3. Multi-domain operations doctrine published; cognitive warfare integrated into training curricula. <br> 4. Common Defence Forces Act enacted. <br> 5. Specialist skill development programmes launched in cyber, data, space, and cognitive domains. | |

## V. Conclusion

Defence Forces Vision 2047 is a serious attempt to define what India's armed forces must become by the centenary of independence. Its structural proposals address real institutional gaps, and it reflects understanding that transformation must extend beyond platforms to doctrine, organisations and human capital.

The burden of proof now lies with implementation, in which political support and financial backing will be crucial. The real test will be whether the transition phase to 2030 produces visible progress in force integration, Prioritised capability induction, organisational restructuring and doctrinal adaptation. If these foundations are laid, Vision 2047 could lead to a credible military transformation. If they are not, the document will remain an ambitious roadmap whose strategic promise was not fulfilled by its execution.

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[1] Defence Forces Vision 2047.
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