



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG POLICY BRIEF

Military Matters 2022: Looking Back to March Ahead

Author

Anil Ahuja

Volume VIII, Issue 6

January 6, 2023



Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

www.delhipolicygroup.org



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Author

Lt. Gen. Anil Ahuja (Retd.), PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM & Bar, Senior Adjunct Fellow for Defence Policy, Delhi Policy Group

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Cover Photographs:

Indian Army braves the harsh winter at the LAC in Eastern Ladakh. Source: Republic World

IAF inducts the made-in-India Light Combat Helicopter on October 03, 2022. Source: Hindustan Times

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurates DefExpo 2022 on October 19, 2022. Source: Hindustan Times

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Introduction

During the year 2022, as regional stability and order receded, the Indian military continued contending with a challenging external security environment. For the third winter in succession, the Army and the Air Force maintain their deployments along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), mirroring the deployment of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Tibet. As assessed by the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), the situation along the northern borders with China is “**stable but unpredictable**”.¹ The Indian Navy also remained combat-ready across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), with regular long-range operational deployment. Concurrently, the services continued with their efforts to address human resource and higher defence organisation-related issues, and to strengthen indigenous defence manufacturing capability.

Along India's western borders with Pakistan, the cease-fire across the Line of Control (LOC), agreed to between the two militaries in February 2021, continued to hold, barring minor violations. The terrorist infrastructure, however, remains intact in Pakistan and its pursuit of a proxy war through the infiltration of terrorists persists.

China and Pakistan also maintain their all-weather, iron-clad friendship.² Pakistan remains a decisive element in bolstering China's influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). For India, the “two-front, multi-domain threat” remains a distinct possibility. Indian armed forces continue balancing their deployments and resources, between the continental and the maritime domain; and within the continental domain, between the Western and the Northern borders.

Despite these increased commitments of the Indian armed forces, transformational changes also continue – in both technology and

¹ Suchet Vir Singh. ‘**Stable but unpredictable**’, says the Army Chief of situation at LAC, no reduction in Chinese troops. The Print. 13 November 2022.

<https://theprint.in/defence/stable-but-unpredictable-says-army-chief-of-situation-at-lac-no-reduction-in-chinese-troops/1213795/>

² Address by Wang Yi, Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Statement at the Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations. Beijing, 25 December 2022.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202212/t20221225_10994828.html



procurement through the 'Aatmanirbharta' (self-reliance) route, and in human resources via the new Agniveer recruitment scheme. This is being attempted without diluting combat effectiveness.

The deft balancing between maintaining operational readiness, achieving self-reliance, and implementing major military reforms, is being done within near-constant budget allocations, hovering between 1.5 to 1.6% of the GDP (less pensions) over the last three years. This is a challenging proposition, with uncertain outcomes.

This brief is aimed at recapitulating major operational and capability development measures taken during the year 2022, visualising likely outcomes, and suggesting the way forward in the ensuing years.

Operational Environment

Northern Borders - China

India stands at the geographic forefront of global geopolitical contestation and power rebalancing, strongly contesting China's military unilateralism and coercion, particularly since mid-2020. During the year 2022, four rounds of Corps Commander level military talks were held between the Indian Army and the PLA (14th round: January 12, 2022; 15th: March 11; 16th: July 17; and 17th: December 20) to defuse the situation along the Northern borders. Of the five 'friction points' where disengagement has taken place so far, only one disengagement, at Hot Springs (Patrolling Point (PP-15) actually took place during the year, following the 16th round of talks. This was also executed only by mid-September, a week ahead of the Uzbekistan SCO summit, suggesting tactical political considerations.

While the primary focus of augmented deployments remains on the Western Sector (Ladakh), an attempt was made, on December 09, 2022, by some 200-300 PLA soldiers, to capture an Indian post at Yangtse (16,000 ft altitude) in the Tawang Sector of Arunachal Pradesh (Eastern Sector). This attempted intrusion, a repeat violation of the Peace and Tranquillity Agreements (1993 & 1996),³ suggests that PLA actions are not localised and have the potential of erupting all along the 3488 km length of the LAC. The successful thwarting of this attempt by the Indian troops also makes it evident that there can be no

³ Kalha Ranjit Singh. India-China Boundary Issues: Quest for Settlement. ICWA. Pentagon Press. 2014. Annexures II and III. Pgs 275-282.



dilution of the manning postures along the entire LAC, despite the protracted commitments that the PLA's intrusions have necessitated.

Overall, in the India-China face-off, little has changed on the ground during the year, despite repeated mutual assurances of `maintaining security and stability, in the `Western Sector' (note the exclusion of reference to the Eastern Theatre – Arunachal Pradesh/ Sikkim).⁴ The prevailing trend suggests that 2023 will be another troubled year between India and China, with continued troop commitment, all along the LAC, at least in the near term. China is also likely to continue its efforts to counter India's advantage in the IOR maritime domain.

Western Borders (LOC/IB)

In the West, Pakistan continues to simmer amidst political and economic turmoil, aggravated by devastating floods and the resurgence of Tehrik-e - Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Unrest in Pakistan's Pashtun belt is intensifying and the TTP has ended its five-month-long ceasefire at the end of November 2022. While this should have provided a rationale for a modicum of rapprochement towards India, the comments of Pakistan's foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in New York,⁵ in December 2022, put to rest any such expectations. The current impasse in India-Pakistan relations is likely to continue.

Despite politically frosty relations, the cease-fire across the LOC continued to hold, barring minor violations. Pakistan, however, continues to retain the "proxy war infrastructure" and "functionality of terrorist training camps", with the presence of terrorists at launch pads. It also continues to exploit the narco-terror nexus targeting Indian youth across the international border (IB). During the year, 18 terrorists infiltrating from Pakistan were neutralised. While marginal re-deployments corresponding to the reduction in levels of incidents have already been carried out by the Army/Rashtriya Rifles (RR), the situation is not yet ripe to completely roll back their counter-terrorist (CT) grid. The recent trend of re-emergence of US-Pakistan engagement has the potential to aggravate Pakistan's cross-border activities.

⁴ 17TH ROUND OF INDIA-CHINA CORPS COMMANDER LEVEL MEETING. Press Information Bureau (PIB). December 22, 2022. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1885707>

⁵ Kallol Bhattacharjee. Bilawal Bhutto's comments on PM Modi uncivilised: India. The Hindu. December 16, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bilawal-bhutto-zardaris-uncivilised-attacks-on-pm-modi-new-low-for-pakistan-says-india/article66270767.ece>



North-Eastern States

With the downward trend in activities of militant groups and reduction in levels of violence in India's Northeast, the government, during the year 2022, removed the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from select areas in seven districts of Nagaland; six districts of Manipur; and 24 districts of Assam.⁶

The commitments of the Army for CI/CT operations in the Northeast have considerably reduced. The framework of the deployment grid, however, needs to be maintained considering the susceptibility of this region to external subversive influence.

Organisational Changes

Appointment of CDS

After a hiatus of nearly nine months, post the fatal helicopter crash death of the incumbent on December 8, 2021, the Government, on September 30, 2022, appointed Lt. Gen. Anil Chauhan (Retd.) as the second CDS, in the rank of a General. His appointment has brought back the momentum of reforms for services integration, including through theaterisation and integrated military commands. In an interaction that he held with the three Service Chiefs, at the end of October 2022, he urged streamlining their perspectives in the coming three months. The current CDS seems to favour a bottom-up approach to this major reorganisation exercise, over imposing a theatre commander without basic architecture and operational doctrine in place.⁷

Air Force Perspective on Theatre Commands

While efforts at reconciling the tri-service perspective over theatre commands continue, Air Chief Marshal V.R. Chaudhari, CAS, has on more than one occasion during this year articulated the Air Force's views on the subject. He has stated that "the model of integration adopted by India's armed forces must be future-ready, reduce levels of decision-making and lead to an organisational structure best suited to India's conditions and geopolitical imperatives".⁸ He has

⁶ Deeptiman Tiwary, Tora Agarwala. Govt removes AFSPA from parts of Nagaland, Assam and Manipur. The Indian Express. April 01, 2022. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/govt-reduce-disturbed-areas-in-3-ne-states-under-afspa-amit-shah-7846179/>

⁷ Hindustan Times. CDS Gen Chauhan begins work on military theatre commands. November 22, 2022. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/cds-gen-chauhan-begins-work-on-military-theatre-commands-101669053040023.html>

⁸ Rezaul H Laskar. On tri-services theaterisation plan, IAF chief VR Chaudhari explains his stand. Hindustan Times. October 04, 2022. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/on-tri-services-theaterisation-plan-iaf-chief-vr-chaudhari-explains-his-stand-101664889972995.html>



also said that the “doctrine of respective service, honed over the years, not be diluted” and has suggested the model of “joint planning and individual service application”. Hopefully, these views would be taken note of and reconciled, as the process recommences in 2023.

Weapon Systems Branch for the Indian Air Force (IAF)

In a significant development, the Government approved the creation of a new 'Weapon Systems (WS) branch' for the IAF. This will entail the unification of all weapon system operators under one entity dedicated to the operational employment of all ground-based and specialist airborne weapon systems with the IAF.

The branch would encompass operators in four specialised streams of surface-to-surface missiles, surface-to-air missiles, Remotely Piloted Aircraft and Weapon System Operators in twin/multi-crew aircraft. The concept of operational employment of this branch is yet to be released in the public domain.

Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) for the Indian Army

To reorganise the Indian Army into a leaner and agile force driven by technology, the process of `IBGisation' has been underway for nearly two years. According to the MOD year-end review,⁹ all Army formations are being structured on an IBG model in a phased manner. The initial phase is said to be nearing completion.

Overall, according to the Chief of Army Staff, there are four key aspects for the transformation of the Army, towards which he is working: human resource management; modernisation and infusion of technology; rebalancing, force restructuring and optimisation; and jointness and better integration.¹⁰

⁹ **MINISTRY OF DEFENCE - YEAR END REVIEW 2022**. December 17, 2022.
<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1884353>

¹⁰ Chadha Pavneet Singh. **Theatre commands only after defence strategy and higher body: Gen Naravane**. The Indian Express. December 30, 2022.
<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/theatre-commands-only-after-defence-strategy-and-higher-body-gen-naravane-8351453/>



Revision of Recruitment Policy for Soldiers - Agnipath

In June 2022, the government introduced the 'Agnipath' scheme,¹¹ a major transformative reform for the recruitment of youth into the armed forces. The stated aim of the scheme is to enable a youthful profile of the military and bring a transformational shift towards more 'tech-savvy' armed forces. The unstated rationale, however, seems to be to substantially reduce the pension and post-retirement liabilities. Despite the short period of engagement of four years, the response from aspirants has been overwhelming. Nearly 5.4 million applications have been received for recruitment into the three services for the first batch.

The new scheme, however, comes with considerable scepticism and apprehensions from veterans and defence analysts.¹² Concerns relate primarily to the inadequacy of the truncated training period; discharge of 75% of 'Agniveers' after four years of service; scarcity of skilled manpower in units likely to emerge at the junior (NCOs) level; and the vulnerability of discharged, trained youth, to undesirable social influence. Concerns have also been raised about the erosion of the ethos of the existing regimental system. Further, the initial overwhelming response is being attributed largely to the closure of the recruitment process for the last two years and to the lack of other job opportunities for the youth.

The opinions thus far on this Agnipath scheme are mixed and the first tangible signs of the impact will begin to emerge only around 2025-26. It would be prudent for all stakeholders to consider this as a pilot project, and implement it with an open mind.

Capability Enhancement Measure

Indian Navy

Aircraft Carrier. Perhaps the most significant capability enhancement measure taken during the year 2022 was the commissioning of the 43,000-tonne Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC-1), INS Vikrant. This \$ 2.5 billion vessel, designed by the Warship Design Bureau of the Indian Navy and constructed at Cochin Shipyard, was inducted into service on September 02, 2022. India is

¹¹ Sumeda. **Explained | The Agnipath scheme for armed forces**. The Hindu. June 16, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/agnipath-scheme-eligibility-recruitment-salary-benefits-soldiers-army-navy-air-force/article65529801.ece>

¹² Peerzada Muzamil. **Why is Agnipath Scheme Facing the Heat?** Outlook. June 18, 2022. <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/why-is-agnipath-scheme-facing-the-heat-news-203154>



looking at importing 26 aircraft as the air component for this carrier. The Rafale (M) and F/A Super Hornet were trial evaluated in 2022. The final acquisition decision for this air component is likely to be taken shortly and the IAC-1 is likely to be fully operational by the end of 2023.

Other Inductions - Ships. INS Mormugao, the second destroyer of Project 15 B, was commissioned in December. Another nine vessels of different categories have been launched at different shipyards during the year.

Aircraft Inductions. The Indian Navy (IN) has so far taken delivery of six MH-60R Seahawk anti-submarine warfare and anti-surface warfare helicopters (three helicopters are still in the US for training). The delivery of the fleet is expected to be completed by 2025.¹³ In addition, 16 ALH Mk III and four P8is have also been inducted, and three new Air squadrons raised during the year.

Indian Air Force

Light Combat Helicopter (LCH)¹⁴ A significant induction into the Indian Air Force in 2022 has been the LCH, Prachand. It is the first indigenous multi-role combat helicopter, designed and developed by the HAL, with ground attack and aerial combat capability, including at high altitudes.

Completion of Rafale Induction. The last of the 36 Rafale jets, completed with India-specific enhancements, was inducted into the Eastern Air Command in December 2022. The two squadrons of Rafale in the IAF are now fully operational.

Successful Missile Tests.¹⁵ Several successful missile tests were carried out during the year 2022. These include: Brahmos Extended Range, Air launched missiles; Agni-3 and Agni-4 (for troops training); SLBM from INS Arihant; Helina, helicopter launched Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM); laser guided ATGM; Manpack ATGM; Naval anti-ship missile; Quick reaction SAM (QRSAM); Medium Range SAM (MRSAM); and Ballistic missile interceptor. Besides being a demonstration of India's capabilities in this field, these weapons add to the cutting edge of its armed forces. A decision has also been taken to induct the

¹³ This induction is part of a 24-helicopter, US \$2.6 billion Foreign Military Sales (FMS) deal, signed in February 2020.

¹⁴ LCH. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. https://hal-india.co.in/Product_Details.aspx?Mkey=54&lKey=&CKey=63
Sumeda. **Explained | The Indian-made LCH 'Prachand' and its significance.** The Hindu. October 07, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/explained-the-indian-made-lch-prachand-and-its-significance/article65966403.ece#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20helicopter%20possesses%20modern%20stealth,%2C%E2%80%9D%20the%20Defence%20Ministry's%20description.>

¹⁵Op.Cit. MINISTRY OF DEFENCE - YEAR END REVIEW 2022.



already tested and proven 'Pralay'¹⁶ missile system into the Indian armed forces. This is a canisterised tactical, surface-to-surface, and short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) with ranges of 150-500 km. This could be a forerunner to the creation of an exclusive Rocket Force which is being contemplated.¹⁷

Defence Budget and Indigenisation

India's enhanced operational commitments and efforts at the creation of a defence industrial base are being sustained through a near-constant defence budget of 1.5% to 1.6% of GDP (nearly 2.1% of GDP with defence pensions). This has been the trend for the last three years, including the financial year 2022-23.¹⁸

From within this budget, 68% of the capital budget was earmarked for domestic capital procurement; 25% of the defence R&D budget for the conduct of research by industry and start-ups; and Rs 60 Crores (approximately US \$ 8 million) to promote innovation in defence. This entails a delicate balance between maintaining combat readiness and indigenisation. In order to develop a strong defence industrial base while concurrently building multi-domain military capability, defence budget allocations and the budgeting process itself need an overhaul. The overall allocations need to be considered as "budget Plus", the "Plus" being the funding to encourage the development of indigenous R&D and industry. In the long run, it would be in order to consider a separate budget for defence, akin to the process adopted for the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) in the US system.

To give a thrust to indigenisation, the 12th edition of the Indian Defence Expo (October 18-22, 2022), on the theme 'Path to Pride', was held exclusively for Indian companies.¹⁹ The Prime Minister announced the 'fourth positive

¹⁶ Characteristics and description. Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pralay_\(missile\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pralay_(missile)).

¹⁷ India clears Pralay tactical ballistic missiles for armed forces, to be deployed along the China border. The Economic Times. December 25, 2022.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-clears-pralay-tactical-ballistic-missiles-for-armed-forces-to-be-deployed-along-china-border/articleshow/96500010.cms?from=mdr>

WION. Explained: Indian armed forces may deploy 'Pralay' missile along Pakistan, China border. <https://www.wionews.com/india-news/explained-indian-armed-forces-may-deploy-pralay-missile-along-pakistan-china-border-546734>

¹⁸ Ahuja Anil. Optimising Capability Building with Defence Budget. DPG Policy Brief, Vol VII, Issue 12, February 09, 2022.

¹⁹ Ministry of Defence. Press Information Bureau Release. Path to Pride: biggest-ever DefExpo, exclusively for Indian companies, opens in Gandhinagar, Gujarat tomorrow. October 17, 2022. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1868584>



indigenisation list²⁰ of 101 items during the event. All items in this list (and its previous versions) are mandated to be procured domestically.

The Government has set a target of creating a defence industrial base of US \$ 22 billion (approximately Rs 1.8 lakh crores) with exports of Rs 35,000 crore (US \$ 4.21 billion) by 2025. Towards achieving these export goals, the defence expo 2022 also included an India-Africa Defence Dialogue & Indian Ocean Region Plus Conclave. It remains to be seen if the defence production would be oriented to meeting our own future needs or to also meet the requirements of likely foreign partners.

The recent success stories of defence indigenisation, besides the IAC-1, LCH Prachand and different missiles (mentioned above), also include the launch of a manufacturing programme for C-295 transport aircraft, a joint project between Tata Advanced Systems Limited, Airbus Defence and Space S.A., Spain. The programme entails acquiring 16 aircraft in fly-away condition and manufacturing at least 40 in India.

That India has the potential to achieve progress in defence manufacturing is indicated by a recent study by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on "Arms Production Capabilities in the Indo-Pacific Region - Measuring Self-Reliance". This report places India fourth in the regional ranking of self-reliance in arms production.²¹

What is further required to shape this success story is a larger allocation of financial resources, realistic plans for technology acquisition and pragmatic, incremental evolution to high-end manufacturing and integration. The problems being experienced in executing the Strategic Partnership model for the P 75 I conventional, diesel-electric submarines with proven fuel cell air-independent propulsion (AIP) is one of the indicators of the challenges that lie ahead.

²⁰ Negi Manjeet. Aatmanirbharta in Defence: PM Modi announces fourth positive indigenisation list at DefExpo. India Today. October 19, 2022. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/aatmanirbharta-in-defence-pm-modi-announces-fourth-positive-indigenisation-list-at-defexpo-2287204-2022-10-19>

The first, second and third positive indigenisation lists', comprising 310 items were promulgated on August 21, 2020, May 31, 2021, and April 07, 2022, respectively.

²¹ SIPRI. Arms Production Capabilities in the Indo-Pacific Region- Measuring Self-Reliance. Pg 2, Table 1.1. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/1022_indopacific_arms_production.pdf



International Defence Cooperation

Emphasis continues to be maintained on the defence component of national diplomatic efforts. Military diplomacy activities during the year included ministerial 2+2 dialogues (with the US and Japan); regular defence minister's dialogues (France, Australia); visits to friendly countries; and conduct of a large number of bilateral and multilateral exercises by all three services. These included exercises with the US, France, Japan, Australia, ASEAN and South Asian neighbours (details are available in the "MOD Year-End Review – 2022").²² The emphasis in most continues to be on counter-terrorism, UN peacekeeping and HADR.

Marching Ahead

With the national and regional security challenges facing India likely to persist during the year 2023, defence and security planners face a plethora of dilemmas which need to be addressed, whether or not India formally enunciates its National Security and/or Defence Strategy. Some significant aspects that merit consideration are as follows:

- Dealing militarily with an increasingly adversarial China, persisting with hostile military actions all along the LAC, while overtly espousing stability in the relationship. India needs to define its red lines and decide on the contemporary relevance of prevailing peace and tranquillity agreements and confidence-building measures (1993 & 1996 agreements).²³
- Consideration of quid pro quo options, should the PLA's aggressive behaviour along the LAC continue.
- Lasting rebalancing of forces between Western and Northern borders, and integration of ITBP and SSB (CAPFs earmarked for manning borders with Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan) for management of Northern borders. Besides coordinated command and control, it is also essential for the optimum utilisation of limited national resources for ISR and intelligence analysis.
- A comprehensive exercise for visualising the pattern of threat manifestation across multiple domains, towards which the capability of the armed forces and the defence industrial base need to be oriented. (This could be done through net analysis or scenario-building exercises).
- An integrated strategy to meet challenges in continental, maritime and other asymmetric domains, according to India-specific weightage of resources for capability development in each.

²² Op. Cit. MINISTRY OF DEFENCE - YEAR END REVIEW 2022. December 17, 2022.

²³ Op. Cit Kalha Ranjit Singh. India-China Boundary Issues: Quest for Settlement.



- Options for strengthening deterrence through synergised applications of strategic assets available.
- Evolving a systemic approach towards conceiving and implementing defence reforms, including theatrisation, integrated military commands, and creation of specialised branches (e.g. Weapon Systems Branch) or organisational structures (e.g. Rocket Force). **Each reform must attain a momentum of its own, based on logic and rationale, rather than being top-driven.**
- Deciding on an optimum blend of technology between existing, emerging and future technologies, best suited for the Indian environment of terrain, climatic conditions, operational tasks, technical prowess (in R&D and absorption), and financial resources available. Technology cooperation, even with the closest strategic partners, needs delicate negotiations for the sensitivities related to the security of niche technologies and systems.
- Bringing clarity between modernisation and transformation of armed forces. Determining what is achievable within financial resources available and evolving doctrines to support transformative changes. **(With meagre budgets, priority must be accorded to modernisation).**
- Making a clear distinction between developing the combat edge and achieving industrial self-reliance in the defence sector. There appears to be a noticeable drift, even amongst the services, towards defining military capability through the quantum of indigenous acquisitions or defence exports.
- Evolving a refined methodology of formulating a defence budget, related to capability development and threat mitigation, rather than pitching for arbitrary percentages, which results in the mere apportioning of resources, as has been the case hitherto.
- Aligning global defence acquisitions (where required) to strategic partnerships, avoiding the trap of sole dependencies on equipment and technology. A realistic appraisal of the impact of war in Ukraine, and the growing Russia-China nexus, on equipment sustenance, and the reorientation of future acquisitions is an urgent imperative.
- Prioritising international defence cooperation, with preference being given to ensuring a secure neighbourhood; strengthening information exchange and interoperability; strengthening indigenous defence capability through acquiring technology and niche weapon systems; acquiring global strategic heft; and safeguarding interests of own diaspora. In this context, a significant lesson that comes to the fore is that there are no iron-clad, altruistic and abiding relationships. Continuity and reliability need to be maintained, based on the convergence of interests and strategic trust.



Finally, the biggest military lesson that emerges out of the tumultuous 12 months of 2022 is the need to develop the 'cutting edge' component of Comprehensive National Power. Quite like India's security challenges, even the desired military reforms are multi-dimensional. Pointers to the way forward which have been provided above merit serious and sustained consideration.



Delhi Policy Group
Core 5A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road
New Delhi - 110003
India

www.delhipolicygroup.org