Editorial

I am pleased to present to the readers the third issue of 2026, a special issue titled "The Year of Reforms: Reshaping India's Defence for the Decade Ahead", comprising a perspective piece, 17 articles and two commentaries. This will soon be followed by another special issue, titled "Harnessing New Age Technology for Defence Capability Development" (October–December 2026).

The special issue begins with a perspective piece titled "From the Desk of India's First Theatre Commander", by Lt Gen Anil Ahuja (Retd). It traces the journey spanning over two decades towards the formal creation of a theatre command (assumed). This piece examines longstanding structural weaknesses that have hampered combat effectiveness, and emphasises integration as the foundation for effective theatre commands, while recommending a phased evolution of theatre commands with interim structures refined progressively.

The special issue contents have been divided into five sections: the first section, featuring three articles, covers jointness and theatre commands; the second section, featuring two articles, deals with defence reforms and institutional transformation; five articles in the third section cover emerging technologies and future warfare; the five articles in the fourth section discuss defence industrial reforms and self-reliance, and the fifth section, comprising two articles, examines reforms in military education.

The first article titled "Jointness, Theatre Commands and the Future of Military Operations", by Mr Suraj Yadav and Mr Abhishek Dey, talks about how 'jointness' has evolved from an idealistic concept into a practical necessity due to the increasing overlap between the land, air, maritime, cyber and space domains. The article emphasises that hasty or incomplete theaterisation could disrupt operational capabilities and may lead to long-term strategic stagnation; and therefore, theatre commands should be implemented in a measured, sequential fashion with joint education and training, development of a common doctrine and refinement of existing integrated command processes.

This is followed by an article titled "Redefining 'Centralised Command–Distributed Control–Decentralised Execution'", in which Gp Capt Akash

Godbole discusses the Indian Air Force's latest doctrine which adopts 'Joint Planning, Centralised Command, Distributed Control, Decentralised Execution' (CC–DC–DE) as the guiding principle for air operations. The author analyses doctrines across the IAF, USAF, NATO, the UK, France, Australia and China and argues that doctrinal adoption without local contextualisation has rendered the CC–DC–DE framework operationally inadequate for the Indian Air Force. The article draws on the *Arthashastra*, the *Mahabharata*, and Shivaji's Maratha campaigns to trace the logic of 'CC–DC–DE' and emphasises that India does not need to import a command logic for its joint force, it needs to recognise and articulate the one it already has.

The third article is titled "Jointness and Multi-domain Operations: A Critical Analysis of Doctrinal and Training Imperatives", in which Gp Capt Swaim Prakash Singh examines the relationship between jointness and multi-domain operations (MDOs) through a tri-service doctrinal analysis, arguing that existing models of jointness, though essential, are insufficient to generate integrated, time-sensitive effects across domains and levels. The article identifies key shortcomings and proposes an Indianised MDO vision that builds on existing doctrinal foundations while outlining practical pathways for doctrinal refinement, capability development, and a structured joint training continuum.

India's recent defence reforms have sought to align military preparedness with rapid advances in emerging technologies. The fourth article titled "India's Defence Reforms and the Challenge of Emerging Military Technologies", by Dr Manish Kumar Yadav and Adv Pushkar Sejwal, examines how emerging technologies both enable and complicate efforts to restructure India's defence research and development ecosystem. It identifies persistent gaps between reform intent and implementation, especially in inter-service coordination, civil–military integration and industrial absorptive capacity. The article further argues that emerging technologies function less as autonomous drivers of transformation and more as stress tests for existing defence institutions, with important implications for military modernisation.

Titled "Agility of Decision-Making in Budgeting and Procurement Procedures", the fifth article is by Mr Amit Cowshish, in which he talks about how decision-making related to budget and procurement procedures is critically dependent on comprehensive planning, covering all the constituents of the Ministry of Defence. It has to be financially viable and result-oriented, to the extent possible. The article argues that if the outlays are linked to expected outcomes and financial powers are delegated in a manner that

enables the authorities tasked with a particular responsibility to discharge it without avoidable constraints, decision-making will improve.

Today, autonomous weapons are being used to locate and destroy targets over long distances without human intervention, and artificial intelligence is turbocharging this revolution. The sixth article titled "AI Kill Chain and Autonomy: Getting Ready for Future Tech Warfare", by Dr Ingudam Yaipharemba Singh, Mr Takhellambam Nepolin and Mr Huirongbam Rishikanta Singh, discusses how artificial intelligence is transforming modern warfare through automated weapons equipped with integrated algorithms and that embracing a smart battlefield is the key to future tech warfare.

The next article is titled "Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems in the Era of Precise Mass: Operational Lessons from Recent Conflicts and Implications for India", in which Lt Gen S. Harimohan Iyer (Retd) draws on verified open-source evidence from the 2026 Iran War, the Russia–Ukraine conflict and India's Operation Sindoor to identify three paradigm-altering developments, i.e., the industrialisation of drone–missile saturation as an operational norm; the emergence of low-cost interceptor drones as the decisive corrective to unfavourable cost-exchange ratios; and the migration of command-and-control architectures to satellite-mediated networks that render conventional electronic warfare increasingly inadequate. The article makes recommendations for India's Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems posture, with particular emphasis on indigenous low-cost interceptor development, directed-energy weapon recalibration and sovereign satellite communication backbones for C-UAS command and control.

The eighth article titled "Towards Technological Sovereignty in Next-Generation Short-Wave Infrared (SWIR) Imaging Solutions for National Defence Applications" is by Lt Col Kabir Kohli, in which he examines the role of indigenous SWIR imaging in advancing India's defence modernisation and reform agenda. It proposes an end-to-end domestic ecosystem integrating research institutions, defence laboratories and industry to accelerate innovation, technology maturation and manufacturing.

It is followed by an article titled "Cold Start to Cold Strike: Reimagining India's War Doctrine in the Age of Multi-domain Conflict", by Lt Gen A.B. Shivane (Retd). Considering future conflicts as compressed, sensor-rich and defined by 'precise mass', where drones, missiles, cyber disruption and narrative contestation converge, this article proposes a doctrinal shift from reactive deterrence to a proactive strategy, through a Cold Strike doctrine that is repeatable, intelligence-driven and designed to dominate the escalation ladder while strengthening deterrence.

In the tenth article titled "Defence Technology and R&D Ecosystems: Harnessing AI, Unmanned Systems, Robotics, Cyber, Electronic Warfare, Space and Quantum Technologies for Military Reforms", Maj Gen Ranjit Ghosh (Retd) examines emerging disruptive technology ecosystems of India and leading countries of the world, and identifies the gaps in India's processes, capability and technology. The article also draws out technology roadmaps to achieve India's enunciated military reforms, and suggests implementable recommendations and policy frameworks.

The eleventh article, "Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence: Progress and Challenges in Building a Resilient Defence Industrial Ecosystem", by Dr Prerna Chahar, assesses India's defence self-reliance initiatives since 2020, highlighting key reforms and their measurable outcomes. The article examines persistent constraints and recommends policy changes to strengthen indigenous design capabilities while avoiding new external dependencies.

It is followed by an article titled "10 Years of Make in India: Indian Navy's Strategic Roadmap towards *Atmanirbharta*", by Cmde Manish Dhakray. The article highlights the key measures undertaken by the Government of India and the Indian Navy in advancing 'Make in India' and *atmanirbharta*, while identifying and examining the challenges faced and opportunities emerging in the pursuit of defence indigenisation. The article stresses the importance of developing advanced technologies to enhance self-reliance and maintain superiority over the adversaries on land, air and seas. The article also charts a roadmap for complete naval indigenisation by 2047.

India has progressively reformed its defence procurement architecture through the Defence Procurement Procedure, the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020 and the draft DAP-2026. These reforms have strengthened transparency, indigenisation and procedural clarity, however, capability gaps and prolonged acquisition timelines persist. The thirteenth article titled "From Process to Performance: Reforming India's Defence Procurement for Emboldening Operational Capability", by Mr Parth Bhatt and Mr Hrithik Singh, distinguishes procedural limitations from organisational, financial, planning and sustainment constraints, and also examines existing provisions relating to fast-track acquisition, lifecycle support, sustainment and innovation pathways.

The fourteenth article titled "Leveraging Private Sector Innovation and MSME Participation in India's Defence Industrial Ecosystem" is by Mr Ravesh Kaul. The article examines how the procurement framework can be leveraged to create more effective approaches for private firms and

MSMEs to participate in defence innovation, including the development of new solutions and indigenisation of existing imported products, systems, sub-systems and components. The article compares India's model with those of China, United States and Israel, and suggests that India should adopt a capability-centric approach to mobilise private sector innovation in defence.

Once almost entirely dependent on the Western suppliers for its military requirements, Türkiye has, over two decades of sustained policy intervention, transformed itself into a credible arms exporter with a growing global market share. The fifteenth article titled "Türkiye's Rise as a Defence Exporter: An Assessment and Its Implications for India", by Dr Abhishek Yadav, approaches Türkiye's experience as an analytically instructive case, one that offers insights into how a middle power has leveraged policy coherence, technological adaptation, and geopolitical positioning to expand its presence in the global defence markets. By examining the Turkish model through this lens, the article identifies specific practices and structural features relevant to India's evolving defence export strategy, while recognising the need for contextual adaptation.

While structural enhancements, such as tri-service integration and procurement improvements, and the adoption of emerging technologies are receiving considerable attention, the human dimension of leadership, morale and professional military education remain relatively underexplored. In the next article, "Imagining the Human Dimension of Reforms: Leadership, Morale and Professional Military Education", Col Ratish Raj examines how these factors can prepare the armed forces to prevail in an era of artificial intelligence, multi-domain threats and cognitive warfare.

The last article titled "Reimagining the Human Dimension: Cognitive Readiness and Professional Military Education for the Indian Armed Forces in the Age of Hybrid Warfare", by Brig Vijay Sagar Dheman, examines the demands of hybrid warfare, including cognitive readiness, psychological resilience and leadership adaptability, against the backdrop of the Chief of Defence Staff's disclosure that 15 per cent of operational time during Operation Sindoor was spent countering false narratives. The article identifies five curricular gaps in India's professional military education (PME) system and draws lessons from the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia to propose reforms suited to India's resource and manpower constraints.

This issue also features two commentaries—"Bridging the Valley of Death: The Missing Link in India's Defence Reform Year", by Cdr Ravi

Shankar NRK (Retd); and "Reforms Without Legislation? Securing India's Defence Transformation Beyond Executive Action", by Mr Augustine R.K.

We hope that this special issue will be received well by our readers. We would also like to thank the authors and the referees who assisted us in the peer-review process. We welcome readers' suggestions on topics the journal should address. We hope that along with our growing readership, we will see a further increase in the number of contributions for our future issues.

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